2018 discharge: EU general budget, European Economic and Social Committee

2019/2060(DEC) - 20/10/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 618 votes to 1, with 68 abstentions, to refuse to grant the Secretary-General of the European Economic and Social Committee discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Economic and Social Committee for the financial year 2018 – Section VI.

In its resolution accompanying the decision on discharge, Parliament welcomed the improvements made to the carry-over situation related to the budget line 'Members of the institution and delegates' by setting a deadline of six weeks for submitting the reimbursement claims. It appreciated that since 1 January 2019 a reduction of carry-overs has been achieved.

The resolution also noted that due to a higher number of opinions and reports issued, which requested more members' involvement in the preparation, higher costs for travelling and other reimbursements occurred.

Parliament appreciated that the Committee plans to increase significantly its budget for IT in order to catch up, close the gap vis-a-vis the other Union bodies and further implement the Digital Strategy for the Committee adopted in June 2019. It noted the efforts necessary to reinforce network capacities and end user equipment in order to allow 100 % of the staff to telework.

Increased visibility and efficiency

Parliament noted that the Committee's new structure, in place since 1 January 2020, attached the legal service directly to the secretary-general with the declared objectives of increasing the visibility and impact of the legal service.

The resolution supported the request of the Committee to strengthen all efforts in respecting the content of the cooperation agreement between Parliament and the Committee. Under the 2014 agreement, the Committee transferred a total of 36 translators to Parliament and only obtained the access to the European Parliamentary Research Service in exchange. The Committee had to hire contract staff and outsource its translation service. Parliament noted with concern that, to compensate the reduction of the translation staff, Parliament has provided additional funds to the Committee for the outsourcing of the translation and that the Committee can reallocate these funds to other policy areas if they are not fully used for outsourced translation, which has happened in the previous years. According to the Parliament, this stipulation is not in

line with the principles of prudent and sound financial management and should be reviewed in the future.

Anti-harassment

Parliament deplored that several members of staff have suffered acts of psychological harassment within the Committee for an unjustifiably long period of time. It regretted that the anti-harassment measures in place in the Committee failed to tackle and to remedy this case sooner because of the senior position of the member concerned. The Committee is called on to revise its rules of procedure and code of conduct to avoid such situation in the future.

Parliament noted that OLAF submitted the case to the Belgian authorities and that the Belgian prosecutor is launching legal proceedings against the member concerned as psychological harassment can be prosecuted under Belgian law. The Committee's wrongdoings in this case have resulted in a material loss of public funds with respect to legal services, sick leave, victim protection, reduced productivity, meetings of the bureau and other bodies, etc. Parliament considered it thus a case of concern regarding accountability, budgetary control and good governance of human resources in the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies.

Parliament welcomed the Committee's reflections, which will result in a detailed action plan to strengthen the zero-tolerance policy towards harassment at the Committee to ensure that such behaviour can never be tolerated.