2018 discharge: EU general budget, European Council and Council

2019/2057(DEC) - 20/10/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 657 votes to 26, with 4 abstentions, to refuse to grant the Secretary-General discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2018, Section II – European Council and Council.

In its resolution accompanying the decision on discharge, Parliament recalled that the European Council and the Council, as Union institutions, should be democratically accountable to all the citizens of the Union for the funds entrusted to them to perform their duties. However, for the past 10 years the Council has refused to cooperate in the discharge procedure and thus forced the Parliament to refuse to grant discharge.

The decision whether to grant discharge for 2018 was postponed in May 2020 similar to what was done in previous years.

Lack of respect and trust

Parliament stressed that this state of affairs is not tenable for either institution: for the Council because no positive decision on the implementation of its budget has been granted since 2009, and for Parliament because it shows a lack of respect for Parliament's role as discharge authority and guarantor of the transparency and democratic accountability of the budget of the Union.

If this situation continues, it shall damage public trust in the financial management of the Union institutions.

Lack of communication

Parliament repeatedly encounters difficulties in receiving answers from the Council due to a lack of cooperation, resulting in the refusal to grant discharge for more than 10 years. It recalled that effective control of the Union’s budget implementation requires loyal cooperation among the institutions. Members recalled the wish of Parliament to start negotiations with the Council with a view to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement to finally overcome this situation of deadlock. The Council is invited to suggest an appropriate date to start negotiations.

Budget separation and transparency

As regards the budget, Parliament insisted that the budget of the European Council and the budget of the Council be separated in order to contribute to more transparency, accountability and efficiency with respect to the expenditure for both institutions as recommended by Parliament in many of its discharge resolutions over the last years.

Parliament also regretted that the Council has not joined the transparent register scheme for lobbyists which also leads to a lack of trust in the Union decision-making process.

Parliament emphasised the importance of allowing citizens to follow the legislative process of the Union easily. It called on the Council to step up its transparency efforts by, *inter alia*, publishing Council legislative documents including minutes of working group meetings and trilogues and other milestone working documents in line with the European Ombudsman's recommendations.

Once again, Members expressed their deep concerns about the corporate sponsorship of Member States hosting the Union Presidency and echoed the concerns expressed by Union citizens and Members on the matter. It strongly recommended the Council to envisage the budgetisation of Presidencies.