2019 discharge: General budget of the EU - European External Action Service

2020/2149(DEC) - 26/03/2021 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Alin MITUA (Renew Europe, RO) calling on the European Parliament to grant the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European External Action Service (EEAS) for the financial year 2019.

Members noted with satisfaction that no specific issues were identified in the sample of transactions concerning the European External Action Service (EEAS) for the third consecutive year. The Court did not identify material levels of error in the EEAS annual activity report.

Budgetary and financial management

The report acknowledged the operational difficulties encountered by the EEAS in the financial management of the EU Network of Delegations due to various crisis situations.

The EEAS is asked to inform the Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control promptly on the budgetary impacts and expenses incurred because of the pandemic.

The report noted that the total budget of the EEAS for 2019 amounted to EUR 694.8 million (an increase of 2.4 % compared to 2018) split as follows: EUR 249.7 million for EEAS headquarters and EUR 445.1 million for the Delegations.

The main budgetary trends in 2019 concern, *inter alia*, reinforcement to deal with the impact of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. Members called on the EEAS to ensure that the Union Delegation to the United Kingdom has a permanent and stable status consistent with the Treaties and that it is provided with the human and material resources to carry out its tasks, in particular with regard to monitoring of compliance.

The headquarters' budget amounted to approximately EUR 250 million, of which EUR 161.8 million (64.8 %) concerned the payment of salaries and other entitlements of statutory and external staff, EUR 32 million (3 %) were for buildings and associated costs, and EUR 35.3 million (14 %) related to IT computer systems including classified information systems, equipment and furniture.

Members stressed the importance of simplifying and modernising the EEAS's financial and administrative management.

Control effectiveness as regards legality and regularity

The report noted the rate of anomalies detected in *ex ante* verifications of commitments and payments (respectively, 308 errors out of 1193, and 394 out of 2119). In both cases the errors are of an administrative nature i.e. incorrect amounts for commitments or a lack of supporting documents for payments presented for ex-ante financial verification.

The EEAS should investigate and resolve cases of administrative errors and report back to the Parliament on its achievements.

Human Resources

Noting the EEAS's vital role in ensuring the coherence of the EU's foreign policy, Members called for sufficient human resources to be made available in order to not put at risk the Union's effectiveness on the international scene. Necessary resources are need for a successful implementation of an efficient EU common security and defence policy.

Geographical imbalances in the composition of the EEAS staff are a recurrent issue and should be addressed.

Working environment

The report noted that there is an increase in cases reported to the mediation service concerning either unsolved disagreements around rights and obligations or different kinds of conflict at work, reaching 183 cases in 2019 (compared to 135 cases in 2018).