2019 discharge: General budget of the EU - European Parliament

2020/2141(DEC) - 28/04/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 612 votes to 83, with 3 abstentions, to grant discharge to its President in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Parliament for the financial year 2019.

Budgetary and financial management

Parliament's final appropriations for 2019 totalled EUR 1 996 978 262, or 18.5 % of heading V of the Multiannual Financial Framework set aside for the 2019 administrative expenditure of the Union institutions as a whole, representing a 2.4% increase over the 2018 budget (EUR 1 950 687 373). Four chapters accounted for 67.8% of total commitments: Chapter 10 (Members of the institution), Chapter 12 (Officials and temporary staff), Chapter 20 (Buildings and associated costs), Chapter 42 (Expenditure relating to parliamentary assistance), indicating a high level of rigidity for the major part of Parliament’s expenditure.

98.8% of the appropriations entered in Parliament’s budget, amounting to EUR 1 973 232 524, were committed, with a cancellation rate of 1.2%. Members noted with satisfaction that, as in previous years, a very high level of budget implementation was achieved. Payments totalled EUR 1 698 971 864, resulting in a payment appropriations execution rate of 86.1%.

Cancelled appropriations and transfers

Cancelled appropriations for the year 2019, amounting to EUR 23 745 738, mainly related to expenditure related to buildings, as well as to remuneration and other entitlements. Eighteen transfers were approved amounting to EUR 76 028 316 or 3.8% of final appropriations. 45.3% of the funds transferred related to Parliament’s buildings policy and mostly, in particular, to help fund the annual payments for the Adenauer building project. Transfers linked to postponements in relation the UKs decision to withdraw from the EU amounted to 25%.

Members found that the overall audit evidence indicates that expenditure on administration is not affected by a material level of error.

As in 2014, 2015 and 2016, the Court found errors in a payment to one of the European political parties, which resulted from non-compliance with the rules on eligibility of expenditure. Members called for greater transparency in the exchange of information to avoid similar situations in the future.

2019 discharge

Parliament stressed that the European elections in May 2019 resulted in a split in two halves for the Parliament in 2019, the first focused on adopting legislation and the second on starting a new parliamentary term. The 9th legislature of Parliament was constituted with 61% of new Members, a substantial increase on past terms and the projected 50% on the basis of which Parliament’s 2019 budget had been established.

The postponement of the date for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union at three occasions during 2019 had an important impact on Parliament's 2019 budget given that salaries and allowances of British Members and their assistants were paid for a longer period than initially foreseen.

Noting that teleworking and videoconferencing arrangements as well as remote voting are now part of Parliament's working arrangements for Members, Members called on the Bureau to explore ways and costs to continue facilitating these arrangements for all Members if they wish to do so and explore using the arrangements also in the future.

However, they pointed out that physical presence in the Parliament's premises cannot be entirely replaced by teleworking.

Human resources

Members drew attention to the 6% staff reduction target which in 2019 required Parliament to eliminate 59 posts from its administration establishment plan. They acknowledged the simultaneous increase in the number of contractual agents and warned of the serious consequences that any budgetary cut in administration or any staff reduction may have in the future of the European civil service and the implementation of the Union's policies.

Parliament welcomed the fact that equal opportunities work is a key element of the Parliament's human resources policy in facilitating access to employment for people with disabilities and enhancing their integration. It welcomed the Bureau's endorsement of a set of gender balance targets for senior and middle management positions in Parliament's Secretariat General, to be achieved by 2024, namely 50% female heads of unit and directors, and 40% at director general level.

Members supported the launch of an awareness-raising campaign in 2019 in support of a zero-tolerance policy towards harassment at all levels, including staff, Members and accredited parliamentary assistants.

Voluntary pension fund

Parliament regretted that no further action had been taken on the voluntary pension fund due to the fact that a number of its Members had decided to challenge the Bureau's decision of 10 December 2018 before the Court of Justice of the European Union. It asked the Secretary General and the Bureau to fully respect the Statute for Members and to establish a clear plan for the pension fund so that Parliament fully assumes its obligations and responsibilities with regard to the voluntary pension scheme for its Members.

Communication and elections

Parliament noted with concern that the turnout of the 2019 European elections remained too low in certain countries and called for the campaign to ensure visibility of the European elections and the role of Parliament in the legislative process to be permanent.

Whilst noting with satisfaction that it was the first time since the first direct elections in 1979 that turnout has increased, Members regretted, however, that the Spitzenkandidaten system for the appointment of the President of the European Commission was not followed.

They stressed the need to review the way in which the leaders of the institutions are appointed and elected.

Members considered it extremely important for Parliament to engage in a permanent dialogue with EU citizens through different communication channels, not only during the election year but also throughout the legislature. They called on Parliament to take steps to counter disinformation through regular

information and warnings, and to organise appropriate training and awareness-raising activities for Members, staff and visitors.

Members supported the Parliament's efforts in 2019 to mitigate cyber security risks. They called for ensuring that appropriate security measures are in place for Parliament's implementation of cloud computing solutions, including those that support its institutional autonomy.

Geographical dispersal of Parliament - single seat

The Court of Auditors has estimated that a move from Strasbourg to Brussels could generate annual savings of EUR 114 million in addition to a one-off saving of EUR 616 million if the Strasbourg buildings are successfully divested.

Members called on the Council to take account of Parliament's position, which has expressed support in various resolutions for a single seat to ensure efficient use of EU taxpayers' money.

Parliament reiterated that the cost and health consequences of the COVID-19 crisis should not be added to the cost of travelling to Strasbourg. It called on Member States, by way of derogation from the Treaty, not to insist on compensatory part-sessions in Strasbourg.

Greening Parliament

Members welcomed the Bureau's adoption on 16 December 2019 of ambitious new targets for Parliament's environmental management system, including a 40% reduction in carbon emissions by 2024 for the new legislative term.