2019 discharge: General budget of the EU - European Committee of the Regions

2020/2146(DEC) - 28/04/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 611 votes to 56, with 31 abstentions, to grant discharge to the Secretary-General of the Committee of the Regions in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2019.

Members welcomed the fact that the Court of Auditors observed that no significant weaknesses had been identified in respect of the audited topics relating to human resources and procurement for the Committee. The Court concluded that the payments as a whole for the year ended on 31 December 2019 for administrative and other expenditure of the Committee was free from material error and that the supervision and control systems examined were effective.

Budgetary and financial management

In 2019, the Committee had an approved budget of EUR 98 751 000 (compared to EUR 96 101 000 in 2018). The execution rate for commitments in 2019 was 99.6 % (compared to 99.3 % in 2018) and that the execution rate for payments in 2019 of 88.8 % was lower than the execution rates for payments in 2018 of 91.0 %. The final execution rate for payment for 2019 will be higher at the end of the budget cycle (after payment of carry-overs).

Human resources

The total number of staff in 2019 was 576 (compared to 538 in 2018). It noted that the number of posts in the establishment plan amounts to 491 which is considered by the Committee as insufficient. All EU nationalities were represented in 2019, with the exception of Luxembourg. The Committee is invited to strengthen the geographical balance of its staff.

Members regretted that the situation in terms of gender balance in middle and senior management positions has not improved but has rather remained relatively stable since 2018, with 35% of these positions being filled by women.

They encouraged the Committee to continue its efforts to achieve gender balance at all levels of the hierarchy. They also welcomed the increase in flexible working hours and teleworking to improve the work-life balance of staff, as well as the continuation of the stress and burnout prevention programme.

Internal management

Members noted that a compliance and effectiveness exercise was launched in 2019 to assess to what extent the Committee complies with the 16 internal control standards. This exercise showed that the overall state of implementation and effectiveness of the requirements remained satisfactory and stable as compared to 2018.

However, areas for further improvement were identified including the alignment of the Committee’s mission and organisational structure with new priorities, administrative cooperation between the Parliament and the Committee, further digitalisation of data storage and simplification of administrative processes as well as an in-depth revamp of the existing business continuity plan arising from the experiences acquired during the current COVID-19 situation.

The Committee was called on to strengthen its efforts to analyse the situation with a view to attaining a fully paperless tendering environment for all procurement procedures.

Inter-institutional cooperation

Parliament stressed the importance of inter-institutional cooperation which ensures synergies and is additional to the joint services agreement between the Committee and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).

Members welcomed the cooperation agreement of 5 February 2012 which remains in force between the Committee and the Parliament and which covers political cooperation between the Parliament and the Committee and administrative cooperation between the Parliament, the Committee and the EESC. It asked the Committee to keep it informed of the outcome of the revision of this agreement and to report on any progress made in negotiating a new cooperation agreement with the Commission.

The Committee is invited to identify other potential synergies and savings, including other areas where administrative functions could be shared between the Parliament, the Committee and the EESC.

Ethics and transparency

The Committee is asked to present a report on the implementation of the code of conduct. Members noted that no new cases of whistleblowing have been submitted in 2019. They called on the Committee to follow the good example of other bodies in publishing on its website a chapter on ethics, consisting of rules to prevent, identify and avoid potential conflicts of interests and which are applicable to all members and staff of the Committee.

A high level of transparency should be respected with respect to lobbying meetings which might influence members and staff in their advisory role to the Union institutions.

Parliament recalled that the Committee was originally set up to deal with important issues, as about three quarters of EU legislation is implemented at local or regional level. Local and regional representatives should therefore have a say in the development of new EU regulations.

Members encouraged the Committee to consider drawing up a plan to reorganise and streamline internal processes in order to achieve closer cooperation with the Parliament and to apply its knowledge in a more effective way.