2019 discharge: General budget of the EU - European Ombudsman

2020/2147(DEC) - 28/04/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 682 votes to 9, with 7 abstentions, to **grant discharge** to the European Ombudsman in respect of the implementation of the European Ombudsman's budget for the financial year 2019.

In the resolution accompanying its discharge decision (adopted by 658 votes to 14, with 19 abstentions), the European Parliament made a series of observations:

Parliament 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 Ombudsman. The payments as a whole for the year ended on 31 December 2019 for administrative and other expenditure of the institutions and bodies were free from material error.

Budgetary and financial management

Parliament noted that the Ombudsman’s budget is mostly administrative, with a large amount being used for expenditure related to persons, buildings, furniture, equipment and miscellaneous running costs. This amounted in 2019 to EUR 11 496 261 (EUR 10 837 545 in 2018). The implementation rate in terms of commitments (including appropriations carried over from 2019 to 2020) is 92.3 % (compared to 95.3 % in 2018) and that of the total appropriations, 89.5 % were paid in 2019 (compared to 91.3 % in 2018).

The resolution welcomed the improvements in carry-overs, such as the fact that the amount of appropriations carried over from 2019 to 2020 is EUR 323 410 representing 2.8 % of the 2019 budget (compared to EUR 433 866 carried over from 2018 to 2019, representing 4 % of the 2018 budget).

Overall, Parliament recognised the sound financial management of the Ombudsman. Whenever, the underspending for certain budget lines appears to be systemic, the Ombudsman reduces the related appropriations in subsequent years, such as the budget line for publications, which was reduced proactively and progressively from EUR 219 000 in 2017 to EUR 123 000 in the 2021 draft budget.

Inter-institutional cooperation

Given the ever increasing workload, Parliament encouraged the Ombudsman to maintain and expand contacts with bodies at EU and national level, which serve the purpose of exchanging information and best practice and adopting common approaches on general administrative, financial, personnel and IT matters as well as on ethics, transparency and public integrity.

The Ombudsman is called on to cooperates closer with Parliament’s Committee on Budgetary Control by making that Committee aware of relevant failures, in form of maladministration and/or institutions’ negative replies to recommendations made by the Ombudsman in a concise and time-relevant format.

Human resources

The need for gender balance at all hierarchical levels was recalled. The resolution acknowledged plans for a reorganisation in 2020 to increase the Ombudsman’s efficiency resulting in a reduction in the number of managers, while taking into account the geographical balance, to the extent possible.

The Ombudsman was called on to tackle personnel-related issues and look into ways of improving recruitment processes. The flexible working arrangement offered to staff (flexitime, telework and part-time work) as well as training on team cohesion was highlighted. The Ombudsman should be a more inclusive workplace for persons with disabilities.

Complaints and inquiries

Parliament observed that in 2019, the number of complaints registered was 2171 (compared to 2160 in 2018), that the number of new cases processed was 2201 (compared to 2180 in 2018) and that the number of cases within the Ombudsman's mandate was 871 (compared to 880 in 2018). It noted that the Ombudsman opened 456 new inquiries based on complaints (compared to 482 in 2018) and closed a record number of 552 complaint-based inquiries (compared to 534 in 2018) and as a result of the high turnover of cases, only 117 inquiries were carried over to 2020 (compared to (222 carried over to 2019).

The categories of complaints that saw the biggest increase include: respect for fundamental rights, proper use of discretion (including infringement procedures), culture of service, transparency and respect for procedural rights.