2020 discharge: General budget of the EU - European Committee of the Regions

2021/2112(DEC) - 04/05/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 558 votes to 42, with 31 abstentions, to grant discharge to the Secretary General of the Committee of the Regions in respect of the implementation of the Committee's budget for the financial year 2020.

Parliament noted that the Court of Auditors had not found any significant weaknesses in the Committee's audit in the areas of human resources and public procurement. On the basis of its audit work, the Court concluded that the payments for the administrative expenditure of the institutions, including those of the Committee, for the financial year 2020 were, taken as a whole, **free from material error**. No specific problems relating to the regularity of transactions were detected by the Court.

In its resolution, adopted by 557 votes to 50 with 26 abstentions, Parliament made the following observations.

Budgetary and financial management

The Committee's budget for 2020 amounted to **EUR 101.5 million** (an increase of 2.8% compared to the 2019 budget of EUR 98.75 million). By the end of 2020, EUR 94.1 million (or 92.7%) of the total appropriations had been committed and EUR 83.6 million (or 82.4%) had been paid. EUR 7.4 million was uncommitted and therefore returned to the EU budget, a figure considerably higher than in 2019. Members pointed out that the uncommitted appropriations are mainly the result of the COVID-19 pandemic and encouraged the Committee to strengthen the monitoring and management of available appropriations.

Members noted a negative trend in the overall execution rate of payments (82.4% in 2020, 88.8% in 2019 and 91.0% in 2018). In 2020, this decrease was mainly due to the cancellation of a large number of meetings and events due to travel restrictions imposed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. EUR 11 million was saved in 2020 due to the pandemic.

Internal management, performance, internal control

Parliament welcomed the launch in 2020 of the Committee's reform programme ‘Going for IMPact!’, which aims to modernise its administration, optimise the use of its resources and strengthen its influence. It welcomed the intensive cooperation between the Committee and the Commission and the Committee's determination to strengthen its involvement in the EU’s entire political and legislative cycle, based on its cooperation with the Parliament and the Commission.

The Committee adopted **eight resolutions and 48 opinions in 2020** (compared to five resolutions and 49 opinions in 2019). Members noted that, in view of the difficulties encountered at the beginning of the pandemic in adopting opinions through referrals within the tight interinstitutional deadlines, the Committee adopted own-initiative opinions, based on Commission documents, in order to contribute effectively and in a timely manner to the Union's response to the pandemic.

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

The establishment plan provides for 491 posts, a number which the Committee considers insufficient. Parliament supports the Committee as it continues to negotiate the expansion of its establishment plan. By the end of 2020, the Committee's total staff will be 601, compared to 610 at the end of 2019. The Committee is encouraged to strengthen its administrative cooperation with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), through the Joint Services Agreement, in order to pool staff to further develop synergies.

In 2020, 55.8% of the Committee's staff were women, compared to 56% in 2019. Parliament deplored the imbalance in the distribution of middle management (32.4% women) and senior management (25% women). It asked the Committee to continue its efforts to **achieve gender balance at all levels of the hierarchy**.

Parliament expressed concern about the 12 potential cases of burnout reported in 2020 but noted the Committee's personalised monitoring of absences to facilitate reintegration after long-term absence. It also welcomed the creation in 2020 of an inter-service task force to mainstream equal opportunities in all HR policies and prepare the five-year strategy (2022-2027).

Ethical framework and transparency

While noting that the agreements on the transparency register do not cover the activities of regional and local authorities and the associations representing them, Parliament recalled the importance of a **high level of transparency** with regard to meetings with lobbyists who may influence the Committee in its advisory role to the EU institutions. It encouraged the Committee to take action to increase the transparency of its interactions with interest representatives.

The Committee is encouraged to find ways to increase staff participation in training activities on ethical issues.

Digital transformation, cyber security, data protection

Parliament welcomed the fact that many work processes have been digitised following the COVID-19 pandemic and that all meetings have been held remotely or in a hybrid form since March 2020, while all members have been equipped with the necessary IT tools to work from home. MEPs highlighted the continued progress in e-invoicing, e-procurement and dematerialisation of financial flows. They welcomed the creation of a post of Deputy Data Protection Officer.

Inter-institutional cooperation

Parliament welcomed the continuously increasing and effective bilateral cooperation between the Parliament and the Committee. It welcomed the decision of the Committee's Bureau in November 2020 to set up a 'European network of regional and local EU councillors' and noted the continued collaboration on key policy issues with the Commission, through cooperation agreements, and with the Trio of Council Presidencies, through joint action plans.

Parliament highlighted the adoption of the new administrative cooperation agreement between the Committee and the EESC, which entered into force on 1 November 2021, and which strengthens the governance of cooperation and control mechanisms to ensure the efficient management of joint services.