

2020 discharge: General budget of the EU - European Ombudsman

2021/2113(DEC) - 04/05/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 612 votes to 4, with 14 abstentions, to **grant discharge** to the European Ombudsman in respect of the implementation of the European Ombudsman's budget for the financial year 2020.

Parliament noted that the Court of Auditors found no significant weaknesses in respect of the audited topics related to human resources and procurement for the European Ombudsman. The Court found, on the basis of its audit work, that the payments for the financial year 2020 for the administrative expenditure of the institutions, including those of the Ombudsman, are, on the whole, **free from material error**. No specific problems concerning the regularity of transactions were detected by the Court.

In its resolution, adopted by 611 votes to 8 with 18 abstentions, Parliament made the following observations.

Budgetary and financial management

In 2020, the Ombudsman's budget amounted to **EUR 12 348 231** (EUR 11 496 261 in 2019 and EUR 10 837 545 in 2018). The implementation rate for commitments (including appropriations carried over from 2020 to 2021) was **94.91%** (compared to 92.33% in 2019) and 93.16% of total appropriations were paid in 2020. Parliament welcomed the increase in the Ombudsman's annual budget execution despite the difficulties encountered due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parliament noted the reduction in the appropriations carried over from 2020 to 2021, which amounted to EUR 215 895.65, or 1.7% of the 2020 budget, compared to those carried over from 2019 to 2020 (which amounted to EUR 323 410, or 2.8% of the 2019 budget). The reduction in expenditure due to the pandemic has freed up resources that have been reallocated to finance part of the costs of moving the Brussels office (to be finalised in 2021). Members welcomed the demonstration of efficient and effective use of the Ombudsman's resources.

Internal management, performance, internal control

Parliament welcomed the adoption of the 'Towards 2024' strategy in December 2020 and noted that the Ombudsman has reviewed its organisational structure. The Ombudsman is invited to monitor and report on the results of the changes to its organisational structure in the long term. The Ombudsman has also developed a new set of key performance indicators (KPIs) which have for the first time been included in the annual management plan for 2021. Members welcomed the achievement of relevant performance results.

Parliament congratulated the Ombudsman on having succeeded in **increasing the level of efficiency in handling complaints and enquiries** by taking admissibility decisions within one month in 98% of cases, closing enquiries within 6 months in 76% of cases or within 18 months in 97% of cases.

Members noted the positive trend in the efficiency rate for the time taken to process complaints, with an average time of 36 days in 2020, while the average time taken to conclude investigations was 133 days. It welcomed the increased proportion of investigations opened on public interest cases, with 65 investigations opened in 2020.

In 2020, the percentage of complaints under the Ombudsman's mandate was 34%, above the target (33%) but below the 2019 level (39%). Members were pleased to note that the efficient handling of cases meant that an extraordinarily small number of enquiries (92) were carried over from 2020 to 2021.

Human resources, staff well-being and gender equality

Parliament noted that the profile and composition of staff in 2020 was very similar to 2019, with a total of **73 staff**, including 37 officials, 8 contract staff and 28 temporary staff.

Members believe that, based on the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, policies on hybrid working arrangements should be reviewed, if necessary, to increase the resilience and efficiency of the institution while maintaining the well-being and satisfaction of staff members.

Parliament noted that the Ombudsman's ability to adapt quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic was largely due to its ability to anticipate and continue its activities. In this regard, it welcomed the Ombudsman's approach to prioritise training on issues related to managing widespread teleworking, improving communication and collaboration between staff and managers, and striking a balance between private life and work while working remotely.

As of 31 December 2020, the gender distribution was as follows: **66% female and 34% male**, which remained unchanged from 2019. Of a total of 6 management positions, 4 are held by women, who also hold the two main senior management positions.

The Ombudsman is encouraged to strengthen diversity in order to make the Ombudsman a more inclusive workplace, including for people with disabilities. It is encouraged to continue its efforts to achieve an acceptable geographical distribution, taking into account the small size of the office.

Ethical framework and transparency

Parliament welcomed the creation of a special page on the Ombudsman's intranet dedicated to ethics and good conduct, in particular the inclusion of guidelines for the implementation of the anti-harassment policy. It congratulated the Ombudsman for publishing its programme on its website and for systematically using the transparency register to check that speakers or guests at events or meetings organised by the Ombudsman were registered.

Members welcomed the conference on the future of Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 regarding public access to documents of the EU institutions, where the Ombudsman stressed the importance of the legal framework for the public to hold the EU to account and called for its modernisation.

Inter-institutional cooperation

Parliament stressed the importance of the Ombudsman maintaining a high level of exchange and cooperation with the European Network of Ombudsmen. It encouraged the Ombudsman to maintain an advisory role for complainants and for members of the European Network of Ombudsmen, also using the remote cooperation tools successfully deployed in 2020.

Lastly, Parliament welcomed the Ombudsman for the series of inquiries and initiatives carried out in 2020 on the response to COVID-19 in the EU institutions and agencies, which helped the EU's administrative services to maintain particularly high standards of good administration, even in difficult times.