

2020 discharge: General budget of the EU - European Council and Council

2021/2108(DEC) - 04/05/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 555 votes to 60, with 13 abstentions, to **postpone its decision** on the discharge to the Secretary-General of the Council in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Council and the Council for the financial year 2020.

Parliament deplored the fact that the Council has shown for more than a decade that it has **no political will to cooperate with Parliament** in the annual discharge procedure, which does not allow Parliament to take informed decisions on granting discharge. It stressed that this attitude discredits the management and democratic control of the Union's budget and undermines citizens' confidence in the Union as a transparent entity.

Furthermore, Members consider it unacceptable that the COVID-19 pandemic and the exceptional situation experienced have been used as an excuse not to resume negotiations on the discharge procedure. Convinced that an agreement on this issue is still possible, they called on the Council to **resume negotiations with Parliament** without delay to find a solution within the current framework of the discharge procedure.

In its resolution, adopted by 584 votes to 37 with 22 abstentions, Parliament made the following observations.

Budgetary and financial management

In 2020, the Council had an overall budget of **EUR 590 633 000** (compared to EUR 581 895 459 in 2019). Members noted an increase in the budget of 1.5% compared to 2019, which confirms a downward trend in the annual budget increase (1.6% in 2019, 2% in 2018 and 3% in 2017). They noted that the Council's share of heading 5 of the multiannual financial framework has fallen from 6.3% in 2015 to 5.8% in 2020. They noted an **overall implementation rate of 93.15%** (compared with 92.3% in 2019).

Parliament noted that the Court of Auditors found **no significant weaknesses** in the Council's audit of the areas of human resources and public procurement. On the basis of its audit work, the Court concluded that the payments for administrative expenditure of the EU institutions, including the Council for the financial year 2020, were, taken as a whole, **free from material error**. In addition, the Court did not identify any particular problems with the regularity of the transactions or following its examination of the Council's supervisory and control system.

Once again, Parliament reiterated its call for the **separation of the budgets of the European Council and the Council** to improve transparency, accountability and efficiency of spending for both institutions.

Internal management, performance, internal control

Members noted with satisfaction that the Council's timely and effective response to the COVID-19 crisis had resulted in a number of structured measures in several areas to protect staff and ensure business continuity. They welcomed the improvements in the GSC's internal organisation, focusing in particular on the need to address the operational limitations arising from the COVID-19 situation. They also noted that in 2020 the Council maintained its legislative activity at the same level as in 2019 despite the difficult working conditions.

Human resources, equality and staff welfare

The establishment plan for 2020 was set at 3 029 posts (compared to 3 033 in 2019), of which 2 905 were filled by 31 December 2020. The occupancy rate is close to 96%.

Parliament deplored the lack of information on the implementation of the Council's action plan on gender equality and on the measures taken to ensure that people with disabilities enjoy the same professional opportunities as others in the Council. It also regretted that the Council has so far ignored Parliament's call for a Council formation on **gender equality**, which could serve as a specific institutional discussion forum to ensure a strengthened integration of gender equality in the Union's strategies.

Ethical framework and transparency

Members welcomed the political agreement on the **transparency register** for interest representatives reached by Parliament, the Council and the Commission on 15 December 2020. However, they regretted the limitations mentioned in Article 5 of Parliament's decision of 27 April 2021 on the conclusion of an interinstitutional agreement on a mandatory transparency register, in particular the fact that the transparency register applies to Member States' permanent representatives only under voluntary schemes.

The Council, including the Member States' representatives, is invited to harmonise, improve and enforce existing rules on ethics, in particular as regards conflicts of interest, revolving doors and lobby transparency rules.

Parliament deplored the use of corporate sponsorship by Member States to cover part of the costs they incur in financing their Council presidency. It reiterated its call on the Council to examine the budgeting of the Council Presidency in order to ensure continuity and efficiency.

Stressing the Council's key role in the **nomination and appointment procedures** within the Union's institutions and bodies, Members deplored the fact that the Council had repeatedly failed to take into account Parliament's recommendations in its advisory role regarding the appointment of members of the Court.

Parliament also reaffirmed its full support for the European Ombudsman's recommendations on the **transparency of the legislative process** in the Council, including making Member States' positions more accessible. Regretting that the decision-making process in the Council is still far from being fully transparent, Members called on the Council to take all necessary measures to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations and the relevant rulings of the European Court of Justice.

Lastly, Parliament reiterated its deep concern about the confirmed **conflict of interest** situations of a number of Member States' representatives involved in the political and budgetary decision-making processes.

Digital transformation, cybersecurity, data protection

The final budgetary appropriations made available to the Directorate-General for Digital Services increased substantially (EUR 10.6 million) at the mid-term and end-of-year reviews, reaching a final amount of EUR 54 675 000, with an implementation rate of 99.99%.

Parliament called on the Council to use open-source technology in order to prevent vendor lock-in, to retain control over its own technical systems, to provide stronger safeguards for the privacy and data protection of its users, and to increase security and transparency for the public.

Lastly, Parliament called on the Council to respect the obligations set out in the Interinstitutional Agreement of 16 December 2020 between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on budgetary discipline, cooperation in budgetary matters and sound financial management and on new own resources.