

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

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The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted a second report by Isabel GARCÍA MUÑOZ (S&D, ES) on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2020, Section II – European Council and Council.

The committee called on the European Parliament to **refuse to grant** the Secretary-General of the Council discharge in respect of the implementation of the Agency's budget for the financial year 2020.

For more than a decade, the Council has shown that it does not have any willingness to collaborate with Parliament in the context of the discharge procedure, making it impossible for Parliament to make an informed discharge decision. Such lack of cooperation demonstrates a **complete disregard for Parliament's role** and violates the principle of loyal cooperation between the institutions, resulting in the very negative effects of discrediting transparency and the democratic scrutiny of the Union budget, as well as **eroding citizens' trust** in the Union. Members are convinced that an agreement on this matter is possible if the Council were to show any political willingness to collaborate.

Budgetary management

Members deplored the fact that the Council is still refusing to cooperate with regard to the discharge procedure, forcing Parliament to refuse discharge. They regretted that the budget of the European Council and the Council has not been divided into two separate budgets, as recommended by Parliament in previous discharge resolutions, in order to improve transparency, accountability and efficiency for each of the two institutions.

Human resources

They also regretted the lack of information on the implementation of the Council's gender action plan and on the measures taken to ensure equal opportunities for persons with disabilities employed by the Council. The Council is called on to provide information to the budgetary authority on gender balance, geographical distribution and disabilities of its members of staff and on the related internal policies.

Members also regretted that the Council exerts its prerogative in the nomination and appointment procedures for many Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies without taking the views of the interested parties into account. It regretted in particular that the Council repeatedly failed to take into consideration the recommendations of Parliament in its consultative role regarding the appointment of the members of the Court.

Transparency

The report noted that the decision-making process in the Council is still far from fully transparent which affects the trust of the citizens in the Union as a transparent entity and thereby jeopardises the reputation of the Union as a whole. Members expressed concern about the increasing role of the European Council with respect to legislative files despite that institution having neither a legislative nor an executive function and not applying the same transparency standards as the Council, meaning that it is **not being held accountable**. They also regretted the fact that the participation of the Member States' Permanent Representatives in the Transparency Register is completely voluntary and insisted that all Permanent

Representations should take an active part in the Transparency Register before, during and after their Member State's Council presidency. The Council is called on to refuse to meet with **unregistered lobbyists**.

Moreover, there have been confirmed conflicts of interest of Member State representatives involved in policy and budget decision-making processes.

Given that **corporate sponsorship** causes reputational damage and risks creating conflicts of interest, the rotating Council presidencies are urged to decline any corporate sponsorship.

Union's institutional architecture

Lastly, Members believe that the expectations of Union citizens constitute an unequivocal mandate for improving transparency and accountability, notably with respect to the Union budget and thus the discharge procedure. Therefore, they reiterated that the **eventual revision of the Treaties** could render the discharge procedure clearer and more transparent, notably by giving Parliament the explicit competence to grant discharge to all Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies individually, but maintained that relaunching the negotiations between Parliament and the Council on the discharge procedure, with a view to finding a solution through better interinstitutional cooperation within the current framework set by the Treaties, would represent a first step in **overcoming the current deadlock**.