

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

2021/2108(DEC) - 18/10/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided to **refuse to grant 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.

In its resolution, adopted by 594 votes to 28 with 19 abstentions, Parliament deplored the fact that the Council has shown for more than ten years that it has no willingness to cooperate with Parliament in the annual discharge procedure, which does not allow Parliament to take informed decisions on granting discharge. Such lack of cooperation violates the principle of loyal cooperation between the institutions. This situation discredits transparency and the democratic scrutiny of the EU budget and erodes citizens' overall trust in the EU.

## *Budgetary management*

Once again, Parliament 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. The resolution recalled that **key performance indicators** are a widely recognised tool for measuring achievement against targets set and that the Council is called on to provide summaries of its key performance indicators and the related results in its management reports.

## *Human resources*

Regretting 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, Parliament called on the Council 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. The need for a dedicated Council configuration and institutional forum on gender equality was stressed by Parliament.

Parliament 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 of Auditors. In 2020, there were only 8 female members compared to 18 male members. Parliament proposed making it compulsory for Member States to present one candidate of each gender.

## *Transparency*

Parliament regretted that the decision-making process in the Council is still far from fully transparent which affects the trust of the EU citizens as a transparent entity and thereby jeopardises the reputation of the EU as a whole. It 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. It 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.

The resolution regretted that, despite several requests by Parliament, the **code of conduct** for the President of the European Council has not been brought into line with those of Parliament and the Commission, in particular in terms of activities to be approved after the President leaves the post.

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, Parliament believes 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, it 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.