2020 discharge: General budget of the EU - European Economic and Social Committee

2021/2111(DEC) - 18/10/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 454 votes to 173, with 8 abstentions, to **grant** the Secretary-General of the European Economic and Social Committee discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Economic and Social Committee for the financial year 2020.

In its resolution, adopted by 550 votes to 56, with 28 abstentions, Parliament nevertheless made a number of recommendations that should be taken into account when granting discharge.

Budgetary and financial management

Parliament reiterated its observations with regard to the 'IT co-financing allowance for members' that provides a yearly IT allowance of EUR 3 000 to each member (EUR 5 000 in 2020 under the one time increase related to the measures introduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic). It asked the European Economic and Social Committee to reconsider the amount of the IT allowance as well as its nature, with the aim of switching from a flat-rate allowance to a payment based on actual and justified costs.

The resolution also called on the Committee to enhance the interinstitutional cooperation and consequently the impact of the Committee's work and for its legal service to be provided with sufficient resources and the requisite mandate to perform its tasks successfully.

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

The Committee's establishment plan has suffered a reduction of 7.98 % compared to 2013 figures (exceeding the 5 % target established by the Commission), which has an evident negative impact on the workload/resources ratio and therefore on the well-being of staff. In this regard, Parliament welcomed the action plan for recruitment and retention of staff, approved in October 2021, and the future revision of the Committee's **mobility policy**.

On gender equality, Parliament noted the ongoing consideration on new measures to promote women's access to management posts, such as intermediate management responsibilities below head of unit level and the practical implementation of gender budgeting.

Moreover, in order to benefit from the lessons learnt in the COVID-19 pandemic, a **recovery action plan** for the Committee was set-up in 2021 aiming to help staff members to move forward towards a post-pandemic way of working. In this regard, Parliament noted that a new decision on teleworking and flexitime was adopted in April 2022 to establish modern, flexible and output-driven working conditions for staff.

Ethical framework and transparency

Parliament noted that the measures delivered by the joint working group entrusted with the revision of the Committee's ethical framework resulted in an ethics action plan adopted in January 2021. It welcomed that a number of actions have been fully implemented such as, *inter alia*, the revision of the decisions on whistleblowing and on harassment, the mandatory training on ethics for all staff, the setting up and training of a new team of ethics counsellors, the ongoing renewal of the network of confidential counsellors.

The resolution also noted that the **strengthened code of conduct** for members provides greater clarity and imposes more severe sanctions in the event of any breach of the rules. Parliament objected to the rejection by the Committee of the use of the Transparency Register on the grounds that the Committee is a consultative body and urged it to join the Register to improve the transparency of its interactions with external interest representatives. It was also requested that all internal procedures and decisions, including the ones on ethics, be published in a specific column of the Committee's website.

Inter-institutional cooperation

While taking note of the ongoing negotiations with the Commission and the Council aiming to strengthen institutional and administrative relations, Parliament called for the cooperation agreement between the Committee and the Parliament to be made binding, in particular calling for close and timely cooperation between the respective rapporteurs of the two institutions, for the Committee's opinions to be shared with the relevant committees of the Parliament during the report drafting phase and for the Committee's rapporteurs to be systematically invited to the presentation of those reports.

Moreover, Parliament recommended that the Committee should carry out a more quantitative and qualitative impact analysis of its opinions and urged the Committee to reinforce the staff working in the areas of legislative work and interinstitutional relations.