2021 discharge: General budget of the EU - Committee of the Regions

2022/2087(DEC) - 30/03/2023 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Mikuláš PEKSA (Greens/EFA, CZ) on the discharge for implementation of the European Union general budget for the financial year 2021, section VII - Committee of the Regions (CoR).

The committee responsible recommended that the European Parliament **give discharge** to the Secretary-General of the Committee of the Regions in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Committee of the Regions for the financial year 2021.

Budgetary and financial management

The report notes that the Committee's final budget for 2021 amounted to **EUR 106 740 880**, a slight increase of 5.15% compared to EUR 101 508 480 in 2020 and EUR 98 751 065 in 2019. It notes the high budget implementation of 98.9%, compared to 92.7% in 2020, closer to the pre-pandemic levels achieved in 2019 and 2018, while the payment rate at 31 December 2021 was 85.1%, an improvement on the 82.4% in 2020.

In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the Committee’s activity, meaning that there was a reduction in the use of appropriations for certain budget lines. The savings are estimated at over EUR 8 million, compared to EUR 11 million for the year 2020.

Internal management, performance and control

The report acknowledges the collective efforts of all parties involved in providing continuous support to the Committee's political activities by ensuring that activities can be carried out through remote meetings and communication platforms in the new circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2021 the Committee adopted referrals referring to Commission legislative proposals, own-initiative opinions and opinions based on Union documents and resolutions, in total **69 documents**, compared to 56 and 55 adopted in 2020 and 2019 respectively. The Committee published studies and reports on specific issues, including the second edition of the annual EU regional and local barometer on the state of the Union's regions and cities and awareness-raising for more than one million regional and local elected representatives.

In 2021, Committee members spoke at 42 parliamentary committee meetings. The Committee's extensive involvement in the Future of Europe conference enabled it to organise 6 high-level events, 60 local events, 63 events during the European Week of Regions and Cities and 7 events in the Young Elected People's Programme, reaching over 10 000 citizens.

The report welcomes the launch in March 2021 of the Committee's new generation network of regional hubs (RegHub 2.0) with more than 50 members and observers to monitor the implementation of EU policies on the ground. It underlines the Committee's key role in the design and implementation of missions under the Horizon Europe programme by encouraging the close alignment of the EUR 1.5 billion allocated to these missions. It welcomes the establishment of strategic cooperation in the implementation of the Green Deal for Europe.

Human resources, equality and staff welfare

The report notes that in 2021 the number of establishment plan posts was 494, compared to 491 in 2020, and that the total number of staff was 606, compared to 601 in 2020. It notes the high occupancy rate of 98% in 2021. It asked the Committee to consider synergies with other institutions in logistics, digital services, drivers and other administrative tasks.

Overall, the gender ratio is the same as in 2020, with women making up 56.8% of the Committee's total staff. Members deplore the **gender imbalance** in senior and middle management in 2021. They welcome the fact that among the measures expected in the new diversity and inclusion strategy are a mentoring programme for female candidates for management positions and workshops to raise awareness among management staff on various equal opportunities issues. They also welcome the attention given to specific gender issues, such as the appointment in 2021 of the first LGBTI+ contact person to assist colleagues who wish to discuss their personal experiences within the Committee.

The Committee is invited to integrate the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic into its internal business continuity and crisis management strategy, in order to develop a results-oriented management model that can support a healthy work-life balance.

Ethical framework and transparency

Members reiterate their request to the Committee to reconsider its participation in the transparency register created by the Interinstitutional Agreement of 20 May 2021 between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission. They reaffirm the importance of a high level of transparency regarding meetings of lobbyists who may influence the Committee in its advisory role to the EU institutions.

The report welcomes the fact that, following the Parliament's recommendations, the Committee has collected from its members and alternates the financial declarations that were still largely missing. It encourages the Committee to follow up any missing financial declarations and to pursue a strict policy of enforcing transparency obligations.

The report makes the following observations, *inter alia*:

- the Committee has made considerable progress in **fully digitising** its work processes and has implemented several important projects to further digitise its business processes and facilitate the political work of Committee members. The Committee is encouraged to maintain a high level of attention to cyber security issues;

- on 10 May 2021, the Budgetary Authority approved the takeover of the rental contract in September 2021 by the Committee and the EESC of the former EEAS building in Belliard 100, the rental costs of which will be covered by the savings made by renting the Van Maerlant building (VMA) at a lower price than the rental costs of the Belliard 68 (B68) and Trier 74 (TRE74) buildings, which were transferred to the Commission in September 2022;

- the Committee has achieved **positive environmental results** in 2021 with regard to electricity, water and paper consumption (reduction of 2.1%, 14.3% and 55% respectively compared to 2020);

- lastly, the new **inter-institutional cooperation agreement** with the EESC will significantly contribute to strengthening governance in terms of cooperation and control mechanisms and is a further demonstration of the willingness to share resources efficiently and create synergies.