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

2022/2087(DEC) - 10/05/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 557 votes to 33, with 21 abstentions, to **grant 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.

In its resolution, adopted by 558 votes to 57 with 21 abstentions, Parliament made the following observations:

Budgetary and financial management

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.

EUR 1.1 million was uncommitted at the end of 2021 and was thus returned to the Union budget, which is considerably less than in 2020, when approximately EUR 7.4 million remained uncommitted, bringing the current figure closer to the pre-pandemic levels.

The Committee is encouraged to continue enhancing the monitoring and management of the available appropriations.

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

Parliament noted 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, the Committee held more than 200 conferences and events. Members of the Committee intervened in 42 meetings of Parliament’s committees whereas Members of Parliament intervened in 58 plenaries or commissions’ meetings of the Committee.

The plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe composed of 449 delegates, included 18 representatives of the Committee and 12 locally and regionally elected politicians. The Committee's extensive involvement in the Conference on the Future of Europe enabled it to organise a series of events that reached over 10 000 citizens.

Parliament welcomed 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 underlined 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 welcomed the establishment of strategic cooperation in the implementation of the Green Deal for Europe.

Human resources, equality and staff welfare

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. Parliament noted 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.

Parliament welcomed the diversity and inclusion strategy for the 2022-2027 period with its accompanying action plan and which sets the short term target of 40 % women in management with main overarching goal of 50 % once the short term goal is achieved. The Committee is invited to be more ambitious in the annual action plans implementing that strategy.

Members also welcomed 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 welcomed 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 which allows for the voluntary involvement of Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies other the signatory institutions, but does not cover the activities of regional and local authorities and the associations representing them. They reaffirmed 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.

Members welcomed 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. They encouraged the Committee to follow up any missing financial declarations and to pursue a strict policy of enforcing transparency obligations.

Parliament also commented on the digital transition, cybersecurity and data protection, buildings and security, the environment and sustainability, interinstitutional cooperation and communication.

The resolution made 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 spent EUR 6 112 846 on IT projects and IT equipment in 2021, compared to EUR 6 392 372 and EUR 4 033 320 in 2020 and 2019. 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.