

2022 discharge: General budget of the EU - European Council and Council

2023/2131(DEC) - 06/03/2024 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Luke Ming FLANAGAN (The Left, IE) on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2022, Section II – European Council and Council.

The committee called on the European Parliament to **postpone** its decision on granting the Secretary-General of the Council discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Council and of the Council for the financial year 2022.

State of play of the discharge procedure

Members deeply regretted that since 2009, and again for the financial year 2021, Parliament had to refuse discharge to the Council because the Council continues to refuse to cooperate with Parliament on the discharge procedure, preventing Parliament from taking an informed decision based on a serious and thorough scrutiny of the implementation of the Council's budget. They also regretted that, on 12 October 2023, the General Secretariat of the Council informed Parliament once again that it would not be answering Parliament's questionnaire and that the Council would not be participating in the hearing which was arranged for 25 October 2023 as part of the discharge process and in which all other invited institutions participated.

The report deplored that the Council, for more than a decade, has shown that it does not have any political willingness to collaborate with Parliament in the context of the annual discharge procedure. The Council is called on to resume negotiations with Parliament at the highest level as soon as possible in order to break the deadlock and find a solution while respecting the respective roles of Parliament and the Council in the discharge procedure and ensuring transparency and proper democratic control of budget implementation.

Members stressed that a revision of the Treaties could render the discharge procedure clearer and more transparent by giving Parliament the explicit competence to grant discharge to all Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies individually.

Political priorities

The report regretted that the Council exerts its prerogative in the nomination and appointment procedures for many Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies without taking into account the views of the interested parties or the recommendations of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).

A serious gender imbalance was noted in the Court, where, at the end of 2022, there were only 9 female members compared to 17 male members. Moreover, Members regretted that the decision-making process in the Council is still far from fully transparent. They also regretted that the Council does not fully utilise the mandatory transparency register beyond its current limitations, rejecting any recommendation for improvements. The report called on the Council to refuse to meet with unregistered lobbyists and on the rotating Council presidencies to stop using corporate sponsorship to contribute to covering their expenses.

Budgetary and financial management

The report noted that the budget for Council was EUR 611 473 556 for 2022, representing an increase of 2.9 % compared to 2021, which is significantly higher than the increase from 2020 to 2021 that was 0.6 %. Members reiterated their regret that the budget of the European Council and the Council has **not been divided into two clearly separated budgets** as recommended by Parliament in previous discharge resolutions in order to improve transparency and accountability.

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

The report noted that, given the Council's lack of cooperation with Parliament, observations in this section primarily rely on aggregated information published on the Council's website which provides limited detail.

The Council, in its budget for 2022, was assigned 3 029 posts which is the same as for 2021 but that the distribution among categories changed with the number.

The Council website states that the Council Secretariat had 3 108 staff (officials, temporary and contract staff and seconded national experts) on 1 January 2023.

Members regretted the:

- gender imbalance in senior management positions within the General Secretariat of the Council;
- 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 has not been replying to the questionnaire from Parliament therefore Parliament has no information about the number of trainees in Council during 2022 and whether they were paid during their traineeship or not.

Buildings

The report noted the total payments with respect to buildings amounted to EUR 45 435 994 in 2022, significantly up from EUR 35 709 119 in 2021, representing an increase of 27.2 %. The major reason for this increase is payments for water, gas, electricity and heating which increased from EUR 2 565 008 in 2021 to EUR 11 233 088 in 2022, equivalent to an increase of 338 %.

Unfortunately, Parliament has no information about initiatives in Council during 2022 concerning improved access to their buildings for people with disabilities and other possible initiatives for people with disabilities.

Communication

The Council is encouraged to engage with the European Data Protection Supervisor with a view to utilise the two open-source social media platforms, EU Voice and EU Video, that were launched as a public pilot project to promote the use of free and open-source social networks.