

2022 discharge: General budget of the EU - European Ombudsman

2023/2137(DEC) - 11/03/2024 - 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 VIII – European Ombudsman.

The committee called on the European Parliament to grant the European Ombudsman discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Ombudsman for the financial year 2022.

Budgetary and financial management

The Ombudsman's budget amounted to EUR 12 222 108 in 2022, which represents a decrease of EUR 280 000 compared to 2021. This decrease is the result of a rationalisation of the budget based on actual needs.

The budget implementation rate was 96.97 % in 2022, which is higher compared to the previous year, when the implementation rate was 88.8 % due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report noted that the Ombudsman did not report any impact from the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on its 2022 budget for missions, procurement or building.

Internal management, performance and internal control

Members underlined that in 2022, noticing the flagrant absence of public information, the Ombudsman anticipatorily asked the European Commission how it will ensure transparency in the negotiations of national recovery plans, how it will guarantee public scrutiny of milestones reached by Member States, and how it will supervise the audits.

The Ombudsman received 2 223 complaints in 2022, compared to 2 192 in 2021, 35 % of which were within the Ombudsman's mandate. Furthermore, the Ombudsman opened 348 inquiries, including 60 inquiries of public importance, and closed 330 inquiries in 2022 compared to opening 338 inquiries in 2021 and closing 305.

Members noted with great concern that the Ombudsman receives a number of complaints from citizens regarding extreme delays in gaining access to requested documents.

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

The composition of the staff in terms of status and job profiles has remained stable in recent years, with a total of 74 staff members at the end of 2022, the same number as in 2021. It is regrettable, however, that the post of the Secretary-General has been vacant since 1 September 2022.

Ethical framework and transparency

The forms for the declarations of conflicts of interest, external activities, publications and exercising an occupational activity after leaving the Union public service were revised to ensure consistent application of the Staff Regulations and the internal rules.

Members regretted that the Ombudsman did not formally join the EU transparency register. On the other hand, they welcomed the high degree of transparency achieved by the Ombudsman by the publication on its website of information on inquiries, missions, meetings and events in which the Ombudsman takes part.

Buildings

The report noted that, following the move of the Ombudsman Brussels' Office to new facilities provided by Parliament in 2021, the building was organised as a collaborative workspace with very few individual offices and flexible collaborative meeting facilities. The Ombudsman returned 20.5 % of the surface rented by Parliament in Strasbourg at the request of the latter and that its rent was subsequently reduced.

Interinstitutional cooperation

Members welcomed the financial and administrative savings achieved through inter-institutional cooperation, in particular the wide-range of service-level agreements concluded with the Parliament and the Commission and the participation in interinstitutional procurement procedures. They welcomed the cooperation that the Ombudsman maintains with the EPPO, the ECA and OLAF aiming to avoid duplication of investigations and discussing topics of mutual interest, such as the improvement of the Union's oversight framework.

Communication

The overall budget for communication and promotional activities increased from EUR 92 100 to EUR 132 400, i.e. 43.8 %, between 2021 and 2022. The Ombudsman is congratulated for developing a comprehensive communication strategy.