

2022 discharge: General budget of the EU - European External Action Service

2023/2134(DEC) - 12/03/2024 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Monika HOHLMEIER (EPP, DE) on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2022, Section X – European External Action Service (EEAS).

The committee called on the European Parliament to grant the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European External Action Service for the financial year 2022.

The EEAS's budget of approximately **EUR 1.1 billion** represents around 9.4 % of the total administrative expenditure. Members noted that 14 of the 60 transactions contained errors but that the Court, based on the five errors which were quantified, estimate the level of error to be below the materiality threshold.

Budgetary and financial management

The report stated that the budget for 2022 for the EEAS was **EUR 786 947 220**, representing an increase of 2.5 % from 2021. The EEAS also received additional contributions to cover common costs of European Development Fund staff in Delegations and other amounts bringing the total available budget for the EEAS (in commitment appropriations) to **EUR 1 143.6 million**. Members regretted that the EEAS administrative budget for 2022 was underbudgeted despite the important role of the institution for the early 2022 broader international context and the increased costs that implied.

Members noted with concern that the EEAS reports that the 2022 budget was especially challenging due to new tasks and increasing running costs. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine created budgetary pressures for the EEAS, including through rising inflation and salary adjustments. The report stressed the importance of establishing a robust and secure financial foundation for the EEAS, emphasising its pivotal role in effectively executing the Union's common security and foreign policy.

Members are also concerned by the extensive use of private leased jets for official trips by the HR/VP. They believe that transparency of work-related activities and sound financial management when using the Union's public funds should be at the core of the Union institutions.

Internal management, performance and internal control

During 2022, the exceptional measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic were phased out and the institutions started to resume functioning normally. Members stressed, however, that the EEAS was affected by the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine as well as security crises in Afghanistan, Haiti and Sahel.

Members welcomed that as a response to the different crises during the last couple of years, the EEAS created the Crisis Response Centre in July 2022, which liaises with external partners like the Union institutions and Member States and brings diplomatic, security and intelligence capabilities together internally.

Procurement and recruitment procedures organised by Union Delegations continue to be a cause for concern. The report stressed that while certain flexibility might be justifiable, the differences between

deadlines and rules for each of the host country might lead to further errors and inconsistencies in procurement procedures. It called on the EEAS to adopt necessary measures to ensure that the number of errors by Union delegations is reduced and report to Parliament about measures adopted.

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

The report noted that, by the end of 2022, there were **5 188 people** employed by the EEAS, out of which 2 419 (46.6 %) were posted at the EEAS HQ and 2 769 (53.4 %) worked in Union Delegations and Offices, which represents an increase of 2.3 % from 5072 people working in the EEAS at the end of 2021 with 2 303 at the HQ and 2 769 in Delegations and Offices.

At the end of 2022, out of 1 715 officials and temporary agents, 881 (51.4 %) were men and 834 (48.6 %) were women, which represents a slight increase from 2021. Members noted that women are notably underrepresented in senior positions.

Members welcomed that the EU Ambassador for Gender and Diversity continues to promote the Union policy framework on Women, Peace and Security and to ensure the participation of women in all diplomatic and political dialogues. They expressed concern about the global status of LGBTIQ+ rights and the growing resistance to women's rights, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights in developing countries. The Commission and the EEAS are asked to address setbacks in recognising and protecting these rights.

The report welcomed that all Member States are represented in the members of staff of the EEAS. It noted however that significant imbalances still persist with 25 Member States represented in all staff categories. Members regretted that the amount of Ambassador posts held by Member States that joined in 2004 or later (EU13) decreased to 17 % in 2022, compared to 18 % in 2021. Members welcomed that, during 2022, the EEAS intensified its efforts and launched a number of initiatives to raise awareness about harassment.

Ethical framework and transparency

The report welcomed that the EEAS continues to provide ethics training in the framework of the Newcomer Welcome Sessions. It regretted that a limited number of fraud-related cases involving misappropriation of Union funds by members of staff at Union Delegation were investigated by OLAF during 2022. Members noted that it would be of great relevance for the EEAS to join the **Union Transparency Register** on the basis of a service-level agreement. They invited the EEAS to publish all meetings with all types of lobby organisations, including those of Heads of Union Delegations, in order to improve transparency.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the situation in Gaza

The report highlighted the key role of the EEAS and especially of its Delegations in the context of the geopolitical impact of the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the resulting need to support partner countries around the world and strengthen global alliances. It called for more efficient use of available resources to be introduced to avoid putting the Union's effectiveness at risk on the international scene.

Members are extremely concerned about the continued engagement of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban with the Russian President despite Union sanctions and an International Criminal Court arrest warrant for war crimes. They invited him, against this backdrop, to report to Parliament on his consideration of the Hungarian Prime Minister's policy vis à vis Russia. Members welcomed that the HR /VP convened an extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council on 10 October shortly after the horrific Hamas

terror attack on Israel. They also took note that the European Council established a common position on the situation in Israel and Palestine at its extraordinary meeting on 17 October 2023 including an action plan with several work strands.

Members are extremely concerned about reports that Union taxpayers' money could be used by Hamas, instead of benefitting the Palestinian civilian population. They urged the EEAS and Commission to insist on controls and audits of UNRWA conducted by ECA and Union-appointed independent external experts.

Lastly, the report warned that 129 cyberattacks on the EEAS were confirmed in 2022. It invited the EEAS to continue to have a strong focus on cybersecurity and hybrid threats.