2022 discharge: General budget of the EU - European Economic and Social Committee

2023/2135(DEC) - 11/04/2024 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 527 votes to 62, with 0 abstentions, to give discharge to the Secretary-General of the European Economic and Social Committee in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Economic and Social Committee in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Court of Auditors for the financial year 2022.

In its resolution, adopted by 540 votes to 67 with 1 abstention, Parliament made the following observations:

In its annual report for the financial year 2022, the Court of Auditors did not identify any specific problems concerning the Committee. Members noted that 14 (23%) of the 60 transactions contained errors, but that the Court considers, on the basis of the five errors that could be quantified, that the error rate is below the materiality threshold.

Budgetary and financial management

In 2022, the final adopted budget for the Committee amounted to **EUR 152 451 643**, representing an overall increase of 5.1 % compared to 2021. The remuneration and allowances budget line increased by 5 % between 2021 and 2022 due to the annual indexation of salaries, whereas the budget line for the fitting out of premises decreased by 77 % between 2021 and 2022 and came back to usual levels after the implementation of important refurbishment works in 2021.

The implementation rate was 96.12 % in 2022, after two years of lower budgetary implementation due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the related travel restrictions. Members noted that the payment execution rate followed the same trend and reached 88.12 % in 2022. The carry-over of appropriations to the year 2022 amounted to EUR 20 162 518, i.e. approximately 13 % of the 2022 annual budget, which was substantially higher than the average in previous years due to the postponement of buildings works in 2020 and 2021.

Members noted that Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine in various ways created budgetary pressures for the Committee, including through rising inflation and salary adjustments, strongly increasing energy costs and the cost of construction and raw materials.

Moreover, the 2022 budget for staff missions increased by EUR 25 000 as compared to 2021, which was financed by a budget transfer, to cover higher expenses due to the increase in flight and hotel prices in 2022 and amounted to a total of EUR 398 974.

Members considered that an allowance for remote participation in meetings (a daily rate of EUR 145) is difficult for the public to understand.

Internal management, performance and internal control

Parliament noted that the Committee pursues its mission through opinions, which refer to legislative proposals made by the Commission (referrals), own-initiative opinions, and exploratory opinions, which feed into the Commission’s work on its planned initiatives, and that the Committee’s positions can be highlighted in resolutions or included in evaluation and information reports. In 2022, the Committee

adopted 202 opinion and reports which is in line with its average annual performance. The Committee also enhanced its engagement in the political and legislative cycle by attending 345 high-level national, Union and international meetings, summits and conferences, and by organising 116 hearings and 29 conferences. In 2022, Members of Parliament participated in meetings or events organised by the Committee on 68 occasions, which remained at the same level as in 2021.

The resolution noted that the Committee continued to reinforce its internal control framework in 2022 with the simplification of the financial circuits under the 'light verification' procedure for some low-value transactions and to develop its policy on sensitive posts.

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

At the end of 2022, the Committee had a total of 706 members of staff, compared to 699 in 2021. The occupation rate of the posts in the establishment plan was 95.1 %. The Committee continued to employ a high proportion of female staff (64.6 % of all staff), including at middle management level (59 % of all managers). Members recommended improving the representation of women in senior management positions. They also encouraged the Committee to continue to take steps to achieve an adequate geographical balance among its staff.

Ethical framework and transparency

Members noted that the rules of procedure are now aligned and consistent with the code of conduct adopted in 2021 following the Committee's internal audit on ethics and integrity. They noted with satisfaction that the Committee continued to train staff and raise awareness about the ethics framework in place, in particular the new code of conduct, harassment and whistleblowing, and the role and responsibilities of the ethics counsellors whose mandate started in January 2022. They believe that only a zero tolerance of harassment policy will prevent the Committee from future allegations of harassment and serious misconduct.

The Committee is congratulated for taking the decision to formally join, as of 1 June 2023, the **EU transparency register** between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission.

Although the Committee has a series of measures in place to prevent fraud, Member regret that an integrated anti-fraud strategy has not yet been put in place despite previous requests from Parliament.

Buildings

Members recalled that the Committee and the Committee of Regions (CoR) lost 5 000 m² in office space following the take-over of the rental contract of the former EEAS building at Belliard 100, which took effect in September 2021, and the building exchange between the Committee and the CoR's Belliard 68 and Trèves 74 and the Commission's Van Maerlant 2 (VMA), which took effect in September 2022.

In 2022, the building strategy of the Committee and the CoR focused on the geographical concentration of the buildings which was achieved by physically connecting all the buildings used by the Committees to their main building. Members welcomed the new physical connection to Parliament's buildings which became operational in November 2022.

Interinstitutional cooperation

Parliament welcomed the budgetary and administrative savings achieved through interinstitutional cooperation, in particular the close cooperation established at administrative level with the CoR with which the Committee shares premises and joint services in the areas of translation, infrastructure, logistics

and IT while maintaining its full institutional autonomy. It invited the Committee and the CoR to explore the possibility of setting up a single administration for their joint services.

Members also welcomed the Committee's strengthened involvement in the legislative cycle and called on the Committee to ensure that its opinions are shared with the members of the relevant committees of Parliament in line with the cooperation agreement between Parliament and the Committee.

Communication

In 2022, the Committee's overall budget for communication was EUR 1.5 million, the same amount as in 2021. Parliament welcomed that the Committee ensures that citizens have open access to its documents via a dedicated electronic register.

With regard to **digitalisation**, Members noted that the Committee adopted a digital strategy aimed at providing IT services in line with best IT management practice while optimising the use of human and financial resources. They encouraged the Committee to raise awareness of cyber security among its members and staff. With regard to the environment and sustainability, Parliament welcomed the sustainable practices adopted by the Committee and the CoR, in particular the "paperless" approach, which has enabled them to reduce their environmental footprint.