

2023 discharge: General budget of the EU - Court of Auditors

2024/2023(DEC) - 31/03/2025 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Dick ERIXON (ECR, SE) on the discharge for implementation of the European Union general budget for the financial year 2023, section V – Court of Auditors.

The committee called on the European Parliament to **grant discharge** to the Secretary-General of the Court of Auditors in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Court of Auditors for the financial year 2023.

Budgetary and financial management

The overall budget of the Court for 2023 amounted to **EUR 175 059 922**, equivalent to an increase of 7.97 % from EUR 162 141 175 in 2022, mainly due to salary adjustments and nine new temporary posts related to NextGenerationEU. The report noted that for 2023 88.5 % of appropriations were for its Members and staff, while 11.5 % were for buildings, equipment and miscellaneous expenditure.

The implementation rate for commitments and payments was high, though slightly lower than in 2022. The utilisation rate for appropriations stood at **97.92 %**, and payments represented 94.45 % of total commitments, compared to 98.12 % and 95.26 %, respectively, in 2022.

The report noted that Russia's illegal and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine in various ways created budgetary pressures for the Court, including through rising inflation and salary adjustments, strongly increasing electricity and heating costs.

Internal management, performance and internal control

Members welcomed that, in 2023, the Court significantly increased its on-the-spot visits compared to the previous three years, when COVID-related travel and public health restrictions were still partly in place. The Court presented two annual reports, four specific annual reports, 29 special reports, four opinions and six reviews, totalling 45 items. Of the 29 strategic measures of the Court's 2021-2025 strategy, one has been cancelled and the other 28 fully implemented.

Members stressed that the Court should have full access to fraud risk assessment tools, including Commission and Member State databases regarding fraud cases related to Union funding, to enhance early warning systems against fraudulent activities. They regretted deeply that the Court's access to FENIX, the new reporting tool on the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), remains an open issue due to the fact the Commission only grants the Court access to some of the FENIX modules, and the information contained therein is not updated in a timely manner. The Court should be granted full and immediate access to all FENIX modules without delay.

The Court is urged to strengthen its role in combating fraud in the Union budget by identifying weaknesses, engaging in anti-fraud discussions, intensifying audits, cooperating with fraud detection bodies, and providing relevant feedback to the discharge authority.

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

Members are alarmed that the recruitment process required additional effort, as around 50 % of candidates turned down the job offers from the Court, in part due to the limited attractiveness of Luxembourg as a place of employment and the high cost of living.

At the end of 2023, had 969 members of staff. Women constitute 53 % of the staff and men 47 %, unchanged from the previous year. The report regretted that women represent only 30 % of senior management, a significant decline from 36.4 % in 2022.

It also noted with concern that 7 cases of burnout were reported in 2023, reflecting the same troubling number as in 2022.

Members expressed regret that the Council has repeatedly nominated members of the Court despite their rejection by Parliament. They stressed that Parliament should hold a binding role in evaluating the suitability of candidates for the Court.

Ethical framework and transparency

The internal rules on reporting serious irregularities (whistleblowing) were updated to make them clearer and more detailed and to provide more information to staff. No whistleblowing cases were reported at the Court in 2023. The Court also launched the process of updating the Court's rules on conducting administrative investigations and disciplinary procedures, which was finalised in early 2024.

Members are concerned by media's report that an EPPO investigation on misuse of funds by the former President of the Court is currently blocked by the decision of the Court not to lift his immunity. They requested the Court to fully cooperate with EPPO on any investigations they may activate and to report on the reasons for the decision not to lift the immunity.

The report also regretted that the Court has failed to fully cooperate with EPPO by refusing to lift the immunity of its former President and by denying EPPO access to conduct a search within its premises in relation to a probe into possible wrongdoing, which could be considered an interference with the proper conduct of an investigation, according to the EPPO.

Cybersecurity

The report commended the Court for good progress in implementing its 2022-2024 cybersecurity plan over the past two years. It noted with appreciation that the Court reviewed and updated its Cybersecurity Incident Response Plan in 2023 and created a form for recording such incidents in the IT service management tool. The form took account of the lessons learned from the July 2023 incident in that it was geared towards collecting all information that could be useful in handling a cybersecurity incident.

Interinstitutional cooperation

In 2023, the Court's auditors spent 1 370 days at Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and at various international organisations and private audit firms, compared to 945 days in 2022. Members called for the formalisation of an annual interinstitutional dialogue between the ECA, European Parliament, Council, and Commission on budgetary control, ensuring systematic follow-up on audit findings and improved oversight of EU expenditure.

The report called on the Court to establish a structured fraud-detection collaboration mechanism with OLAF and EPPO, including real-time data-sharing agreements and a joint audit approach for high-risk EU funding areas.

Communication

The budget allocated for the Court's communication and promotional activities amounted to EUR 225 000 with a utilisation rate of 81.13 % (EUR 182 549.84) with most of the budget spent on both media monitoring services (EUR 81 650).

Lastly, in 2023, the Court launched a new website, receiving over one and half million visits, with around 700 000 unique visitors, which represents an increase of more than 14 % compared to 2022.