2023 discharge: General budget of the EU - European Ombudsman

2024/2027(DEC) - 02/04/2025 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Joachim Stanisaw BRUDZISKI (ECR, PL) on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2023, Section VIII - European Ombudsman.

The committee called on the European Parliament to grant discharge to the European Ombudsman in respect of the implementation of the European Ombudsman's budget for the financial year 2023.

Budgetary and financial management

Members noted that the Ombudsman's budget amounted to EUR 13 212 447 in 2023, which represents an increase of EUR 990 339 (or +8.1%) compared to 2022. Budget monitoring efforts during the 2023 financial year resulted in a budget implementation rate of 95.39%, which represents a decrease of 1.58% compared to 2022. Members congratulated the Ombudsman for reducing his budget allocated to staff missions for the fourth consecutive year.

Internal management, performance and internal control

The European Ombudsman linked nine key performance indicators (KPIs) to the high-level objectives of its ‘Towards 2024’ strategy and met or exceeded targets for 14 of the 19 elements in 2023. Despite an increase in the workload in 2023 (2 392 complaints, 398 inquiries), the Ombudsman **improved its efficiency**, notably by reducing the number of complaints by simplifying the handling of ‘failure to reply’ inquiries and streamlining the handling of ‘out of mandate’ complaints and requests for information.

Members commended the Ombudsman for reducing the time taken to process cases at various stages of the procedure but regretted that the **average time** (165 days) for processing an inquiry remained high in 2023. The Ombudsman is invited to continue working towards better compliance with its findings, recommendations and suggestions.

Members noted the problems observed regarding the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), namely the significant delays encountered by the European Commission in responding to access to information requests, in particular the late publication of the largest beneficiaries of the RRF by Member States, which undermines transparency requests. The Ombudsman is invited to continue monitoring the Commission's efforts to ensure transparency and effective supervision of the RRF.

The report noted with concern that the Ombudsman receives numerous complaints from citizens regarding very long delays in obtaining **access to requested documents**. Given that delayed access effectively amounts to denied access, administrative procedures should be streamlined to provide citizens with timely access to documents.

The competent committee makes the following observations, *inter alia*:

- the total number of **staff members** increased by 11%. The share of staff assigned to the Ombudsman's core activities (complaints and inquiries) also increased. The occupation rate increased from 91.8% in 2022 to 95% in 2023. The Ombudsman must continue efforts to achieve a balanced geographical distribution of nationals of all Member States among his staff, in particular at management level. The

overall gender ratio remained the same in 2023 as in 2022, namely 67% women and 33% men. No cases of harassment were reported in 2023;

- the Ombudsman has strengthened the institution's **ethical framework** and revised the whistleblower policy. Staff confirm a high level of awareness of ethical issues. No cases of conflict of interest or cases involving whistleblowers were reported in 2023. The Ombudsman has not formally joined the Union's Transparency Register but has aligned its practices with the Transparency Register's principles, by verifying that speakers or interlocutors at events or meetings organised by the Ombudsman are registered in it. The Ombudsman is invited to introduce a mandatory declaration of financial interests for senior management staff;

- Members acknowledged the success of the approach of mobilising integrated systems and resources from other Union institutions, in particular Parliament and the Commission, in order to optimise the use of the budget and strengthen coordination, for example in the area of **digitalisation**. They noted, in this context, the successful implementation of the Commission's machine translation tools which were integrated into the Ombudsman's systems (e.g. the website) in 2023;

- over the years, the Ombudsman has reduced its environmental footprint and continued to encourage sustainable mobility in 2023;

- financial and administrative savings have been achieved through **interinstitutional cooperation**. Members welcomed the formalisation of collaboration between Parliament and the Ombudsman in the area of cybersecurity and congratulated the Ombudsman on his good cooperation with OLAF, the European Court of Auditors and the European Public Prosecutor's Office;

- the overall budget for **communication** and promotional activities (publications, event organisation, digital communication, etc.) increased by 17.20%. Members welcomed the efforts made by the Ombudsman and the measures he has taken to raise citizens' awareness of his role and the possibility of using his services in cases of maladministration by an EU institution.