Discharge 2023: EU general budget – European Council and Council

2024/2021(DEC) - 07/05/2025 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 588 votes to 62, with 16 abstentions, to **postpone** its decision on granting the Secretary-General of the Council discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Council and of the Council for the financial year 2023, Section II - European Council and Council.

In its resolution, adopted by 526 votes to 119 with 20 abstentions, Parliament deeply regrets that, since 2009, and again for the financial year 2022, it has had to refuse discharge to the Council because the Council continues to refuse to cooperate with Parliament on the discharge procedure, preventing Parliament from taking an informed decision based on a serious and thorough scrutiny of the implementation of the Council's budget.

Parliament reiterated that the Council's continued refusal to engage in the discharge procedure is an unacceptable **breach of democratic accountability** and in this regard, it called for legal and procedural amendments to **withhold budgetary appropriations** to any Union institution that fails to comply with transparency obligations.

Despite the Council being unwilling to cooperate in the discharge procedure, Parliament, nevertheless, stressed some political priorities and sets out some observations concerning the budgetary and financial management of the Council and other observations relevant for the discharge procedure.

Political priorities

Parliament expressed deep concern over the Hungarian government's misuse of its role in the EU Presidency to pursue bilateral engagements that contradict the Union's core values, such as Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin, despite Union sanctions and the International Criminal Court arrest warrant against the latter for war crimes. It noted with alarm similar engagements with other authoritarian leaders, undermining the EU's credibility. In this regard, it called on the Council to firmly condemn such actions and to take all necessary measures to ensure that Member States holding the Presidency act in alignment with EU principles, safeguarding the Union's integrity and values.

Budgetary and financial management

The budget for Council was **EUR 647 908 757** for 2023, representing an increase of 6 % compared to 2022, which is higher than the increase of 2.3 % between 2021 and 2022. Members reiterated their regret that the budget of the European Council and the Council has not been divided into two clearly separated budgets as recommended by Parliament in previous discharge resolutions in order to improve transparency and accountability.

The overall implementation rate of the Council's budget in 2023 was 97%. Appropriations carried over from 2023 to 2024 totalled EUR 85.5 million covering mainly computer systems, cost of interpretation provided in 2023, for which invoices have not been yet agreed with the European Commission services at the time of the closure, buildings, information and communication, audio-visual and conference equipment, other staff expenditure: and transport.

Members also expressed concern over insufficient control mechanisms regarding the Council's use of consultancy services and external contractors and called for full disclosure of all contracts exceeding EUR 50 000.

Other observations

Parliament made a series of observations as follows:

- out of 3 116 members of **staff** at the end of 2023, 79 % were permanent staff, 12.8% were temporary staff, 7.2% were contractual agents and 1% were seconded national experts. Members regretted the lack of publicly available information concerning the gender and geographical distribution of staff in the Secretariat;

- the Council is urged to establish stricter post-term employment rules for senior officials, including an extended cooling-off period and mandatory public disclosure of private-sector affiliations. It is also called on to make the participation of Member States' Permanent Representations in the EU Transparency Register mandatory;

- stronger and harmonised **ethics rules** on conflicts of interest, revolving doors, and lobbying transparency are needed;

- regrettably, the Council continues to systematically withhold or delay **access to legislative documents** and the decision-making process in the Council is still far from fully transparent, thereby hindering public scrutiny of its decision-making, negatively affecting citizens' trust in the Union as a transparent entity and jeopardising the reputation of the Union as a whole;

- out of 113 **digitalisation projects** in the annual work plan, concerning, in particular, the areas of shared services, policy, legal and IT, 37 % were completed at the end of the year while 8 % were cancelled or merged and 38% were still ongoing. Parliament urged the Council to accelerate the implementation of secure digital voting and document-sharing systems to enhance efficiency, accountability, and reduce unnecessary paper-based processes.