Basic information

2019/2060(DEC) DEC - Discharge procedure	Procedure completed
2018 discharge: EU general budget, European Economic and Social Committee **Subject** 8.70.03.08 2018 discharge	

Key players

European Parliament	**Committee responsible**	**Rapporteur**	**Appointed**
	CONT Budgetary Control	ZDECHOVSKÝ Tomáš (EPP)	03/06/2020
European Commission	**Commission DG**	**Commissioner**	
	Budget	OETTINGER Günther	

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
27/06/2019	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2019)0316	
18/09/2019	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
19/02/2020	Vote in committee		
04/03/2020	Committee report tabled for plenary	A9-0078/2020	
13/05/2020	Decision by Parliament	T9-0120/2020	Summary
13/05/2020	Results of vote in Parliament		
13/05/2020	Report referred back to committee		
14/05/2020	Results of vote in Parliament		
15/05/2020	Results of vote in Parliament		
01/10/2020	Vote in committee		
13/10/2020	Committee report tabled for plenary	A9-0188/2020	
19/10/2020	Results of vote in Parliament		
20/10/2020	Decision by Parliament	T9-0270/2020	Summary

20/10/2020	Results of vote in Parliament		
21/10/2020	Results of vote in Parliament		
22/10/2020	Results of vote in Parliament		
23/10/2020	Results of vote in Parliament		
14/12/2020	Final act published in Official Journal		

Technical information

Procedure reference	2019/2060(DEC)
Procedure type	DEC - Discharge procedure
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 165
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	CONT/9/03069 CONT/9/00921

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		PE639.831	11/12/2019	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE645.093	10/02/2020	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A9-0078/2020	04/03/2020	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T9-0120/2020	13/05/2020	Summary
Committee draft report		PE653.766	10/07/2020	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE657.305	10/09/2020	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A9-0188/2020	13/10/2020	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T9-0270/2020	20/10/2020	Summary

Council of the EU

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Supplementary non-legislative basic document	05760/1/2020	17/02/2020	

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Non-legislative basic document	COM(2019)0316	27/06/2019	

Additional information		
Source	**Document**	**Date**
European Commission	EUR-Lex	

Final act
Budget 2020/2046 OJ L 420 14.12.2020, p. 0016

2018 discharge: EU general budget, European Economic and Social Committee

2019/2060(DEC) - 20/10/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 618 votes to 1, with 68 abstentions, to refuse to grant the Secretary-General of the European Economic and Social Committee discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Economic and Social Committee for the financial year 2018 – Section VI.

In its resolution accompanying the decision on discharge, Parliament welcomed the improvements made to the carry-over situation related to the budget line 'Members of the institution and delegates' by setting a deadline of six weeks for submitting the reimbursement claims. It appreciated that since 1 January 2019 a reduction of carry-overs has been achieved.

The resolution also noted that due to a higher number of opinions and reports issued, which requested more members' involvement in the preparation, higher costs for travelling and other reimbursements occurred.

Parliament appreciated that the Committee plans to increase significantly its budget for IT in order to catch up, close the gap vis-a-vis the other Union bodies and further implement the Digital Strategy for the Committee adopted in June 2019. It noted the efforts necessary to reinforce network capacities and end user equipment in order to allow 100 % of the staff to telework.

Increased visibility and efficiency

Parliament noted that the Committee's new structure, in place since 1 January 2020, attached the legal service directly to the secretary-general with the declared objectives of increasing the visibility and impact of the legal service.

The resolution supported the request of the Committee to strengthen all efforts in respecting the content of the cooperation agreement between Parliament and the Committee. Under the 2014 agreement, the Committee transferred a total of 36 translators to Parliament and only obtained the access to the European Parliamentary Research Service in exchange. The Committee had to hire contract staff and outsource its translation service. Parliament noted with concern that, to compensate the reduction of the translation staff, Parliament has provided additional funds to the Committee for the outsourcing of the translation and that the Committee can reallocate these funds to other policy areas if they are not fully used for outsourced translation, which has happened in the previous years. According to the Parliament, this stipulation is not in

line with the principles of prudent and sound financial management and should be reviewed in the future.

Anti-harassment

Parliament deplored that several members of staff have suffered acts of psychological harassment within the Committee for an unjustifiably long period of time. It regretted that the anti-harassment measures in place in the Committee failed to tackle and to remedy this case sooner because of the senior position of the member concerned. The Committee is called on to revise its rules of procedure and code of conduct to avoid such situation in the future.

Parliament noted that OLAF submitted the case to the Belgian authorities and that the Belgian prosecutor is launching legal proceedings against the member concerned as psychological harassment can be prosecuted under Belgian law. The Committee's wrongdoings in this case have resulted in a material loss of public funds with respect to legal services, sick leave, victim protection, reduced productivity, meetings of the bureau and other bodies, etc. Parliament considered it thus a case of concern regarding accountability, budgetary control and good governance of human resources in the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies.

Parliament welcomed the Committee's reflections, which will result in a detailed action plan to strengthen the zero-tolerance policy towards harassment at the Committee to ensure that such behaviour can never be tolerated.

2018 discharge: EU general budget, European Economic and Social Committee

2019/2060(DEC) - 13/05/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament decided by 669 votes to 10, with 11 abstentions, to **postpone its decision** on the 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 for the financial year 2018.

In the resolution accompanying its discharge decision (adopted by 638 votes to 39, with 16 abstentions), the European Parliament made a series of observations:

Anti-harassment policy

Parliament recalled that between July and November 2018, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) received accusations of harassment from five different sources concerning a member of the Committee, who has been chairman of the Employers' Group (Group I) since April 2013, and that OLAF decided to open an investigation on 6 November 2018.

Following the report and recommendations submitted by OLAF to the President of the Committee on 17 January 2020, Members expressed concern that OLAF concluded that harassment against two staff members, inappropriate behaviour (serious misconduct) against one staff member and one member of the Committee and misconduct against other staff members had been committed, and that it had also decided to refer the matter to the Belgian authorities.

Parliament gave the Committee until September 2020 to inform the discharge authority of the measures taken to follow up OLAF's recommendations and to sanction these wrongdoings. The Committee was asked to put in place a plan of action to actively prevent and combat harassment in the workplace, to raise awareness of harassment and to promote a culture of zero tolerance of harassment.

Budgetary and financial management

Parliament welcomed the Court of Auditors' conclusion that the payments concerning the European Economic and Social Committee's administrative expenditure for the financial year ended 31 December 2018 were, taken as a whole, free from material error and that the supervisory and control systems examined were effective.

In 2018, the Committee's budget amounted to EUR 135 630 905, compared to EUR 133 807 338 in 2017, an increase of 1.36 %. The overall implementation rate was 98.66 % (compared to 96.5 % in 2017 and 97.2 % in 2016). Members are concerned, however, that the final appropriations for Members' travel expenses and allowances (EUR 20 247 625 in 2018) increased slightly despite the decrease in the number of meetings. They also regretted that many of the appropriations automatically carried over from 2017 to 2018 have been significantly overestimated, reminding the Committee of the importance of making a realistic adjustment to the budget in line with real needs.

Parliament noted that the administrative cooperation agreement concluded by the Committee, the Committee of the Regions and Parliament in 2014 had expired on 31 December 2019, as the agreement had not been renegotiated or extended. If a new agreement is negotiated, Members acknowledged that, from a political point of view, the agreement would need to be updated to meet current challenges, such as the new multiannual financial framework or the new rules on cohesion policy.

Other comments

Parliament expressed its concern about the confirmation of the presence of asbestos in critical areas of the VMA building, including the parking area. Deploring the lack of information for stakeholders and Members and staff, it invited the Committee to remedy the situation.

The Committee was also invited, *inter alia*, to:

- eliminate all measures that could weaken the legal service in the exercise of its corresponding activities and functions and ensure that its legal service has a sufficient number of staff to perform its duties and is able to keep its independence;

- ensure full transparency at all stages of the recruitment procedure (publication, selection, appointment and entry into service), without any exception, as provided for in the Rules of Procedure;

- continue its rationalisation measures in the area of translation;

- develop a long-term human resources policy framework, taking into account the work-life balance of its staff, lifelong guidance and career development, gender balance, teleworking, non-discrimination, geographical balance and the recruitment and integration of people with disabilities;

- analyse further the situation in order to identify additional areas for joint services with the Committee of the Regions;

- implement the new digital strategy and the new multi-annual IT spending plan as soon as possible.

In general, Parliament highlighted the work achieved in recent years on issues such as performance-based budgeting, the ethical framework and the many related rules and procedures, enhanced communication activities and the increasing number of measures to improve transparency. It underlined the importance of collaboration and of sharing of experience among Union institutions and bodies and suggested that an analysis be made of the possibility of formalised networking activities in different domains in order to share best practises and to develop common solutions.