



Follow-up of recommendations from the Committee on Budgetary Control in the framework of the discharge procedures

Extrated from the from the Annual Activity Report 2018, Chapter 2 'Management and follow-up of controls' pages 30 to 31

2017 discharge

On 26 March 2019, the European Parliament adopted the discharge decision for the 2017 budget¹⁹. The recommendations are set out below and the Ombudsman's comments on them appear in the text boxes.

Point 4: Welcomes the Ombudsman's commitment to ensure that all available funds are spent in a result-oriented manner and welcomes the fact that it is taking into account the results of a number of measurements and statistical data that impact directly on the office's work [...].notes, however, that the KPI for overall compliance reached only 85 % and fell short of the target of 90 %; encourages the Ombudsman to continue to improve its performance in this regard.

The Ombudsman takes note of this and is committed to pursuing her efforts to encourage, to the maximum extent possible, institutions to comply with her recommendations and suggestions and thus to reach an even higher compliance rate.

Point 10: Welcomes the Ombudsman's compliance with the inter-institutional agreement to reduce staff by 5 % between 2013 and 2017 with an overall contribution of 3 posts; notes, however, that in the meantime, the contractual staff increased from 8 to 15 and remunerated trainees from five to nine; is concerned that part of this increase results from the need to compensate for the overall reduction in staff, and might be detrimental to the distribution of workload and the long-term organisational development of the institution.

Point 11: Notes the increase of received complaints by 20 %, from 1 839 in 2016 to 2 216 in 2017; notes that the Ombudsman opened a total of 433 inquiries on the basis of complaints (245 in 2016) and closed 348 such inquiries (291 in 2016); notes that this increase is due inter alia to new implementing provisions under which a number of cases which would have previously been classified as 'no grounds for an inquiry', are now closed as 'inquiries in which no maladministration was found'; stresses that due to the steady increase in the number of complaints submitted to the Ombudsman, the workload for the Ombudsman's Office has become too heavy; asks for an increase of the budget for the Ombudsman to tackle this.

The Ombudsman indeed has limited resources to deal with an ever increasing workload. To address this issue, the Ombudsman has conducted a review of the establishment plan and made requests to the budgetary authorities in the framework of the 2020 budget procedure with a view to aligning the establishment plan with the actual needs and workload of the office. This includes the identification of functions of a permanent nature that should be carried out by permanent staff rather than by contract agents.

Point 15: Welcomes the continuous efforts to reduce translation costs, primarily linked to the production of publications; welcomes that translation expenses decreased by 11 % from EUR 293 000 in

¹ Decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the European Union general budget for the financial year 2017, Section VIII - European Ombudsman (2018/2174(DEC))

2016 to EUR 263 000 in 2017; takes note that the Ombudsman annual activity report recognises that a threshold has been reached below which it will be difficult to go in the future; therefore encourages the Ombudsman to mindfully keep on working in the efforts to reduce translation costs without endangering the good functioning of the translations and publications.

The Ombudsman takes note of this recommendation.

Point 21: Reiterates that the Ombudsman is encouraged to strive for geographical balance in management positions in the mid- to long-term and to ensure that there is a proportionate representation of all Member States among the population of the staff.

The Ombudsman takes note of this recommendation.

Point 22: Welcomes the Ombudsman's efforts to improve the work-life balance of its staff; notes that as from 2017, flexitime has become the default working regime that applies to all staff, including trainees; further notes that a total number of 58 out of 83 active members of staff made use of the possibility to telework in 2017; encourages the Ombudsman to continue striving for an exemplary and innovative role in all personnel matters given its role on issues related to ethics and working conditions within the EU institutions;

The Ombudsman takes note of this recommendation.

Point 23. Notes that there have been no harassment cases in 2017 at the Ombudsman, welcomes the adoption of the harassment prevention and protection policy as well as the planned training programme for all staff, including managers; welcomes, moreover, the adoption of the Guide on Ethics and Good Conduct for the Ombudsman's staff and the Internal Charter of Good Management Practice; encourages the Ombudsman to closely monitor the efficiency of its policy; to continue raising awareness about harassment at the work place and to foster a culture of zero tolerance toward harassment and asks the Ombudsman to report back to the discharge authority in its next annual activity report.

The Ombudsman takes note of this recommendation.

Point 24. Notes with satisfaction that the issue of 'revolving doors' has been addressed by the Guide on Ethics and Good Conduct; calls on the Ombudsman to ensure that these guidelines are effectively applied and asks the Ombudsman to report back to the discharge authority in its next annual activity report.

The Ombudsman takes note of this recommendation and is committed to ensuring effective implementation of the Guide on Ethics and Good Conduct.

Point 26. Notes with satisfaction that the issue of 'revolving doors' has been addressed by the Guide on Ethics and Good Conduct; calls on the Ombudsman to ensure that these guidelines are effectively applied and asks the Ombudsman to report back to the discharge authority in its next annual activity report.

The Ombudsman takes note of this recommendation.