



Plenary sitting

A8-0121/2016

8.4.2016

REPORT

on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2014, Section VIII – European Ombudsman
(2015/2161(DEC))

Committee on Budgetary Control

Rapporteur: Ryszard Czarnecki

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1. PROPOSAL FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DECISION

on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2014, Section VIII – European Ombudsman (2015/2161(DEC))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2014¹,
 - having regard to the consolidated annual accounts of the European Union for the financial year 2014 (COM(2015)0377 – C8-0206/2015)²,
 - having regard to the Court of Auditors' annual report on the implementation of the budget concerning the financial year 2014, together with the institutions' replies³,
 - having regard to the statement of assurance⁴ as to the reliability of the accounts and the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions provided by the Court of Auditors for the financial year 2014, pursuant to Article 287 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
 - having regard to Article 314(10) and Articles 317, 318 and 319 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
 - having regard to Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and repealing Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002⁵, and in particular Articles 55, 99, 164, 165 and 166 thereof,
 - having regard to Rule 94 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A8-0121/2016),
1. Grants the European Ombudsman discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Ombudsman for the financial year 2014;
 2. Sets out its observations in the resolution below;
 3. Instructs its President to forward this decision and the resolution forming an integral part of it to the European Ombudsman, the European Council, the Council, the Commission, the Court of Justice of the European Union, the Court of Auditors, the European Data Protection Supervisor and the External Action Service, and to arrange for their publication in the Official Journal of the European Union (L series).

¹ OJ L 51, 20.02.2014.

² OJ C 377, 13.11.2015, p. 1.

³ OJ C 373, 5.11.2015, p. 1.

⁴ OJ C 377, 13.11.2015, p. 146.

⁵ OJ L 298, 26.10.2012, p. 1.

2. MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2014, Section VIII – European Ombudsman (2015/2161(DEC))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2014, Section VIII – European Ombudsman,
 - having regard to Rule 94 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A8-0121/2016),
1. Notes with satisfaction that in its 2014 annual report, the Court of Auditors observed that no significant weaknesses had been identified with respect to the audited topics related to the human resources and the procurement for the European Ombudsman ("the Ombudsman");
 2. Emphasises the fact that on the basis of its audit work, the Court of Auditors concluded that the payments as a whole for the year ended on 31 December 2014 for administrative and other expenditure of the institutions and bodies were free from material error;
 3. Stresses that the Ombudsman's budget is purely administrative and amounted in 2014 to EUR 9 857 002 (EUR 9 731 371 in 2013), with EUR 7 977 702 being allocated to Title I (expenditure relating to persons working for the institution), EUR 1 346 800 attributed to Title 2 (buildings, equipment and miscellaneous operating expenditure) and EUR 532 500 for Title 3 (expenditure resulting from special functions carried out by the institution);
 4. Takes note that of the total appropriations, 97,87 % were committed (98,20 % in 2013) and 93,96 % paid (91,82 % in 2013) with a utilisation rate of 97,87 % (98,20 % in 2013); notes a decrease in the utilisation rate in 2014;
 5. Notes a particular increase of commitments in 2014 with the Members of the institution; asks the Ombudsman to give a comprehensive description of these amounts in the next follow-up report to the discharge;
 6. Welcomes the fact that in line with the Strategy Towards 2019, the Ombudsman pursued own-initiative inquiries, taking up a more systematic and systemic approach towards complex issues falling within its mandate; considers this to be an effective tool; asks the Ombudsman regularly to inform the discharge authority about the impact of the inquiries;
 7. Welcomes the creation of a new post designated as "own-initiative inquiry coordinator"; considers it to be a step towards more efficient work of the institution; invites the

Ombudsman to report to the discharge authority on the performance, impact and efficacy of this post;

8. Calls for the Ombudsman's office to comply with the principle of transparency, in particular as regards identifying and assigning clear lines of responsibility, and to ensure that the Ombudsman website is updated regularly and accurately reflects the organisation chart of the institution;
9. Notes that the Strategy Towards 2019 introduces new key performance indicators (KPI) with very specific targets; understands from the KPI scoreboard that some of the targets have not been reached; in this regard notes that the Ombudsman scored lower in terms of the proportion of inquiries closed within 12 and 18 months and furthermore in the proportion of cases in which the admissibility decision is taken within one month; encourages the Ombudsman to develop a strategy towards mitigation of any potential weaknesses and to inform the discharge authority on the development;
10. Welcomes the fact that the ratio of closed to ongoing inquiries at the end of the previous exercise reached the highest ever level (1,4 closed enquiries for every ongoing one, compared with a target of 1,1); stresses that the proportion of inquiries closed within 12 and 18 months decreased in 2014; acknowledges the Ombudsman's observation that the new strategy including the pursuit of own-initiative inquiries had impact on the number of the cases closed;
11. Stresses that the number of complaints falling outside the Ombudsman's remit remains very high, especially from citizens of some Member States such as Spain and Poland, which undoubtedly creates a great deal of frustration among citizens regarding Union institutions in general and the Ombudsman in particular; calls on the Ombudsman, therefore, to improve its information and communication policy and to forge stronger links for smooth and regular cooperation with the European Network of Ombudsmen and national and regional ombudsmen to remedy this problem;
12. Notes from the KPI scoreboard that the level of satisfaction among the Ombudsman's staff was lower than targeted; notes from the Ombudsman that this was mainly related to crucial changes in the institution and has since been remedied by number of measures; calls on the Ombudsman to continue to ensure a high level of staff satisfaction;
13. Welcomes the well-structured, clear and reader-friendly annual activity report (AAR) presented by the Ombudsman; welcomes its intensified external communication strategy and stronger presence on social media;
14. Expects the Ombudsman to continue to strive for consistency in the AAR and to make it fully comprehensive, as it is an important tool for the assessment of its work;
15. Notes the large number of missions by Ombudsman staff between Brussels and Strasbourg – 212 in total, costing EUR 126 000 plus an estimated EUR 60 000 in lost working time while travelling; calls on the Ombudsman to reduce to the fullest extent possible the number of missions and to make maximum use of videoconferencing and other related technical means, as other institutions are doing, to avoid unnecessary travel and significantly reduce costs; reminds the Ombudsman, furthermore, of the

environmental impact of CO₂ emissions generated by this commuting and that it is therefore important for the Ombudsman to assume its responsibilities in this regard and report to Parliament on progress it has made;

16. Is concerned at the Ombudsman's recruitment policy, which has involved using emergency procedures directly to employ former trainees on short-term contracts; deplores the fact that three temporary staff were hired in 2014 without passing any selection procedure; calls on the Ombudsman to bring, as a matter of urgency, its staff selection criteria into line with the European civil service's standards of quality, transparency, objectivity and equal opportunities;
17. Welcomes the progress made by the Ombudsman in 2015 on gender balance; stresses, however, that the available data for 2014 still show great disparities, particularly in AST posts (21/9) and management positions (9/2), and emphasises the importance of setting medium-term objectives to achieve the necessary balance, and of continuing to work actively in this direction;
18. Asks the Ombudsman, with a view to ensuring greater transparency, to include a table of all human resources broken down by nationality, gender and grade in its AAR; calls on the Ombudsman to answer questions raised by Parliament and the other institutions on pensions;
19. Renews its call, made last year, for the Ombudsman to state the rate of requested but unused interpretation services for 2014 in its AAR for 2015;
20. Welcomes the savings on the budget lines for translation and publications;
21. Reiterates its calls for the Ombudsman to include in its AAR, in compliance with the existing rules on confidentiality and data protection, the results and consequences of closed OLAF cases, where the institution or any of the individuals working for it were the subject of an investigation;
22. Takes note of the Ombudsman's calculations with regard to potential savings of EUR 195 000 should the institution only have one seat; takes into account that the seat of the Ombudsman is tied to the seat of Parliament and therefore deems it necessary that the Ombudsman be included in any debate on centralisation of the Parliament's seat; stresses that such centralisation should be actively promoted.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

Date adopted	4.4.2016
Result of final vote	+: 19 -: 1 0: 1
Members present for the final vote	Louis Aliot, Inés Ayala Sender, Dennis de Jong, Martina Dlabajová, Ingeborg Gräßle, Verónica Lope Fontagné, Monica Macovei, Dan Nica, Gilles Pargneaux, Georgi Pirinski, Petri Sarvamaa, Claudia Schmidt, Bart Staes, Marco Valli, Derek Vaughan, Anders Primdahl Vistisen, Tomáš Zdechovský
Substitutes present for the final vote	Marian-Jean Marinescu, Miroslav Poche
Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote	Birgit Collin-Langen, Bodil Valero