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REPORT

on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2021, Section VII – Committee of the Regions
(2022/2087(DEC))

Committee on Budgetary Control

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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 2021, Section VII – Committee of the Regions (2022/2087(DEC))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2021¹,
 - having regard to the consolidated annual accounts of the European Union for the financial year 2021 (COM(2022)0323 – C9-0232/2022)²,
 - having regard to the Committee of the Regions' annual report to the discharge authority on internal audits carried out in 2021,
 - having regard to the Court of Auditors' annual report on the implementation of the budget concerning the financial year 2021, 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 2021, 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) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012⁵, and in particular Articles 59, 118, 260, 261 and 262 thereof,
 - having regard to Rule 100 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A9-0080/2023),
1. Grants the Secretary-General of the Committee of the Regions discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Committee of the Regions for the financial year 2021;

¹ OJ L 93, 17.3.2021.

² OJ C 399, 17.10.2022, p. 1.

³ OJ C 391, 12.10.2022, p. 6.

⁴ OJ C 399, 17.10.2022, p. 240.

⁵ OJ L 193, 30.7.2018, p. 1.

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 Committee of the Regions, the Council, the Commission and the Court of Auditors, and to arrange for their publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union* (L series).

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 2021, Section VII – Committee of the Regions (2022/2087(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 2021, Section VII – Committee of the Regions,
 - having regard to Rule 100 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A9-0080/2023),
- A. whereas the Committee of the Regions (the ‘Committee’) is a political assembly of 329 members elected from the regions, cities, villages and municipalities of the 27 Member States, operating as a consultative body for the Union institutions, with the mission of contributing to the Union policy shaping and decision making process from the point of view of the local and regional authorities, and at the same time contributing to make the Union more effective and closer to the citizens;
- B. whereas the consultation of the Committee by the Commission or the Council is mandatory in certain cases, while the Committee may also adopt opinions on its own initiative and enjoys a wide area for referral, as set out in the Treaties, allowing it to be consulted by Parliament;
- C. whereas the Committee’s activities are defined on the basis of its overall political strategy as set out in its resolution of 2 July 2020 on its priorities for 2020-2025¹, and whereas the Committee adopted three political priorities for its 2020-2025 mandate, accompanied by three communication campaigns: Bringing Europe closer to people, Building resilient regional and local communities, and Promoting cohesion as a fundamental value of the EU;
- D. whereas the local and regional administrations account for one third of public spending, half of public investment and one fourth of tax revenues and, in many Member States, hold competencies in key areas such as education, economic development and cohesion, environment, social protection, health and services of general interest, hence the coordination of local, regional, national and European levels increases the legitimacy of the legislation, improves ownership and pursues more effectively the benefit of citizens;
- E. whereas the Committee pursues its political goal to strengthen its involvement in the entire Union political and legislative cycle while making more tangible the connection with Union citizens using the Committee’s members as powerful multipliers in their

¹ Resolution of the European Committee of the Regions — The European Committee of the Regions’ priorities for 2020-2025 — Europe closer to the people through its villages, cities and regions (OJ C 324, 1.10.2020, p. 8).

communities and in their national associations of local and regional authorities;

- F. whereas the Committee identified nine flagship initiatives and followed them up in 2021 to make its action more strategic and impactful: (1) Recovery and Resilience Facility, (2) Health related COVID-19 response, (3) The Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, (4) CoR4Climate Pact, (5) The future of cross-border cooperation, (6) The New Pact for Migration and Integration, (7) Conference on the Future of Europe, (8) Long-term vision for Rural Areas, and (9) a Strategic CoR's Budget – ensuring a fair share of the resources for the Committee;
- G. whereas Regulation (EU) 2021/1060², governing Union cohesion policy and funding between 2021 and 2027, that entered into force in July 2021, encompasses references to the partnership and multilevel governance principle, supported by the Committee and Parliament and entailing the involvement of regions;
- H. whereas the over four hundred national and regional programmes in place for the delivery of Union cohesion policy in the 2021-2027 programming period will make available around EUR 380 billion, under different funds, to tackle the economic, social and environmental challenges that Union regions and cities are facing;
- I. whereas, on 13 February 2021, Regulation (EU) 2021/241³, establishing the Union's Recovery and Resilience Facility, entered into force, providing the legal basis for distributing funds and loans of up to EUR 672,5 billion (in 2018 prices) to the Member States between 2021 and 2026 while aiming to support, among other things, economic, social and territorial cohesion and to address disparities between the regions of the Union;
- J. whereas, as a Union institution within the meaning of the Financial Regulation, the Committee is required to adopt its own annual accounts, prepared in accordance with the accounting rules adopted by the Commission's accounting officer (European Union Accounting Rules) and based on the International Public Sector Accounting Standards, which are ultimately consolidated into those of the Union
- K. whereas in the context of the discharge procedure, the discharge authority wishes to stress the particular importance of further strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the Union institutions by improving transparency and accountability, and implementing the concept of performance-based budgeting and good governance of human resources;
1. Notes that the budget of the Committee falls under MFF heading 7, 'European public administration', which amounted to a total of EUR 10,7 billion in 2021 (representing 5,9 % of Union spending);
 2. Notes that the Court of Auditors (the 'Court') in its Annual Report for the financial year 2021 increased its sample of transactions under Administration from 48 in 2020 to 60 in

² Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy (OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 159).

³ Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility (OJ L 57, 18.2.2021, p. 17).

2021;

3. Notes that the Court mentions that the work carried out over many years indicates that MFF heading 7 concerns an overall low-risk spending; notes, however, that the annual Report on the implementation of the budget for the 2021 financial year does not provide any relevant information on the Committee and invites the Court to include in its next annual reports comprehensive data regarding the completion of all requirements necessary for a consistent discharge procedure;
4. Notes with satisfaction that in the annual report for the financial year 2021, the Court did not identify any specific issues concerning the Committee;

Budgetary and financial management

5. Notes that the final budget of the Committee for 2021 was EUR 106 740 880, representing a slight increase of 5,15 % compared to EUR 101 508 480 in 2020 and from EUR 98 751 065 in 2019; observes that, as expressed in last year's discharge resolution, the most important budget lines were those for remuneration and allowances, followed by rent and lease of buildings, IT equipment and software, and then allowances, attendance at meetings and associated expenditure and interpreting services;
6. Observes the high budget implementation of 98,9 %, compared to 92,7 % in 2020, closer to the pre-pandemic levels of 2019 and 2018 of 99,6 % and 99,3 % respectively, and notes that the payment rate on 31 December 2021 was 85,1 %, improved from 82,4 % in 2020 but still lower than 88,8 % and 91 % in 2019 and 2018 respectively; underlines that the average payment time in 2021 was 16,11 days, which was an improvement on 2020 (17,21 days) and on 2019 (17.23 days); notes that the use of electronic invoices is still not satisfactory, amounting to only 32 % of all invoices in 2021, which represents an increase compared to 29 % in 2020, but a decrease compared to 33 % in 2019;
7. Notes the increase in payments from 2020 to 2021, both years of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is related to the increased level of activities carried out in 2021, when additional investment in the IT sector allowed for more extensive use of videoconferencing facilities for virtual and hybrid meetings (in comparison to 2020), thus avoiding cancelling or postponing events despite that fact the restrictions imposed as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic were still in place
8. Remarks that a surplus of EUR 11 198 492 was carried over from 2021 to 2022, slightly less than in 2020 and much higher than in 2019 (when respectively EUR 11 708 078 and EUR 8 874 776 were carried over); observes that EUR 1,1 million was uncommitted at the end of 2021 and was thus returned to the Union budget, which is considerably less than in 2020, when approximately EUR 7,4 million remained uncommitted, bringing the current figure closer to the pre-pandemic levels (in 2019 EUR 0,4 million was uncommitted); encourages the Committee to continue enhancing the monitoring and management of the available appropriations;
9. Notes that, in 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the Committee's activity, meaning that there was a reduction in the use of appropriations for certain budget lines (meeting and travel and subsistence allowances, interpretations, missions

and building running costs), while for others the health crisis required additional expenditure (medical services and IT and videoconferencing projects); observes that, accordingly, savings were estimated to amount to more than EUR 8 million, compared to savings of EUR 11 million in the 2020 financial year;

10. Remarks that, in order to optimise the use of appropriations, the Committee made budget transfers representing a total of EUR 8,7 million in 2021 (8,2 %), compared to EUR 6,6 million in 2020 (6,5 %), and that those transfers were mainly from the domains where substantial savings were made to the domains that needed reinforcement (IT, communication and external expertise); underlines that seven external transfers of appropriations were prepared by the Committee and approved by the budget authority in 2021; observes that the Committee did not have one specific mopping up transfer at the end of the year;
11. Is aware that tender procedures concerning the Committee are organised either by its own services or on behalf of the Committee by the joint services shared by the Committee and the European Economic and Social Committee (the ‘EESC’); observes that in 2021, in comparison to previous years, the Committee’s own services handled an unprecedented number of high-value open procedures, which resulted in the signature of a record number of multiannual framework contracts in the course of that year; remarks that in the same timeframe, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of low- and middle-value negotiated procedures related to organisation of activities or events remained lower than usual with roughly half of the procedures foreseen in the 2021 work programme having to be cancelled; notes that the procedures concerned were related to planned commission and political group meetings which went from a hybrid format to a fully remote format;

Internal management, performance and internal control

12. Understands that, in 2021, the main challenges for the Committee were related to the need to fully adapt to the new circumstances that arose as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that this situation included a widespread lack of resources and the need to adapt IT resources to support the digitalisation process; acknowledges the collective efforts of all parties involved which allowed continuous support to be provided to the political activities of the Committee, ensuring that activities continued to be carried out via remote meetings and via communication platforms such as Agora and KIKLOS, while guaranteeing the health and safety of the Committee’s members and staff; welcomes the setting up of a series of task forces entrusted with tackling cross service issues, such as the need for simplifying the Committee’s processes, for reinforcing strategic planning and for digitalising its procedures;
13. Notes that the Committee pursues its mission through opinions, which refer to legislative proposals made by the Commission (referrals), and own-initiative opinions, which call on the Union institutions to take action, and that the Committee’s positions can be highlighted in resolutions; observes that, in 2021, the Committee adopted referrals, opinions on own initiative and opinions based on Union documents and resolutions for a total of 69 documents, compared to 56 and 55 adopted in 2020 and 2019 respectively; notes that the Committee published studies and reports on specific issues, such as the second edition of the EU annual regional and local Barometer report on the state of Union regions and cities, and carried out outreach to more than one

million elected regional and local politicians via the Committee's 'Regional and Local EU Councillors' campaign that coordinated networks such as the RegHub 2.0 network as part of the Fit-for-Future Platform for better regulation, and notes that, in 2021, the Committee held more than 200 conferences and events while communicating its work through relevant channels and tools;

14. Observes that, in 2021, after the first year of its 2020-2025 mandate which was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee met six times in plenary session (three remote and three hybrid);
15. Notes that, in 2021, members of the Committee intervened in 42 meetings of Parliament's committees (compared to 14 in 2020 and 13 in 2019), that Members of Parliament intervened in 58 plenaries or commissions' meetings of the Committee (compared to 46 in 2020 and 62 in 2019) and that the number of times the Committee participated in Council Presidency events has remained substantially stable over the years (20 in 2021, 15 in 2020 and 22 in 2019);
16. Welcomes the cost-effectiveness analysis of the Committee's planning and reporting and internal control system performed in 2021, which reviewed the entire administrative environment, streamlining processes, simplifying, digitalising and profiting from the synergies between the different instruments through project convergence; notes that, in March 2021, the Committee's bureau approved the concept note for the analysis, in the following months the adaptation of each one of the instruments began, and by December 2021 the analysis of the business continuity policy and the risk management methodology was done;
17. Appreciates the review and simplification of some of the internal control processes, such as the management of financial actors that took place in 2021; points out that also the IT governance model was streamlined to better allocate the limited IT resources;
18. Welcomes the measures adopted in 2021 in the context of the Going for IMPact! initiative, aiming to render the Committee more cost-effective and to increase its political impact; notes the multiple projects, such as the convergence project, which aims to simplify the administrative framework, and thus reduce overlaps and enhance synergies between different instruments related to planning and reporting, risk management, impact reporting and business continuity, and some internal control standards processes; supports the many (55) simplification projects defined and launched at the level of the Committee's different directorates, almost half of them fully completed in 2021 (26) and another large quota (25) approximately half completed;
19. Appreciates that the plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe (the 'COFE'), composed of 449 delegates, included 18 representatives of the Committee and 12 locally and regionally elected politicians, considering that the initial number proposed was only four representatives of the Committee and that this number was increased following a proposal by the Committee; notes that this significant participation in the context of the COFE allowed the Committee to organise 6 high-level events, 60 local events, 63 events at the European Week of Regions and Cities and 7 events for the Young Elected Politicians Programme, reaching more than 10 000 citizens, local politicians and stakeholders; underlines that in the multilingual digital platform of the COFE, the Committee submitted 44 ideas with key messages from adopted opinions in

the context of the COFE's nine main topics and that many of the views expressed in those ideas can be found in the COFE's Report on the final outcome; further encourages the Committee to assist its members in participating in local dialogues with citizens on European matters;

20. Underlines that in its Report on the final outcome, the plenary of COFE in its 40th proposal, measure 3, calls for the Committee to be reformed to “encompass adequate channels of dialogue for regions as well as cities and municipalities, giving it an enhanced role in the institutional architecture, if matters with a territorial impact are concerned”;
21. Welcomes the launch, in March 2021, of the new generation of the Committee's Regional Hubs Network (RegHub 2.0), part of the ‘better regulation instruments’ of the Committee, counting more than 50 members and observers (local and regional authorities and bodies from 21 Member States), tasked with monitoring the implementation of Union policies on the ground and ensuring that the views of regional and local stakeholders are taken into account when such policies are evaluated at European level; notes that RegHub 2.0 has become a subgroup of the Commission's Fit for Future (F4F) platform, a high-level expert group assessing existing Union policies and issuing opinions on how to better adapt those policies to future challenges, and contributed to four F4F opinions in 2021, out of which three were drafted by one of the Committee's representatives within the F4F platform;
22. Notes with satisfaction that the Committee operates various platforms, networks and tools aiming to support the political cycle, including the Cohesion Alliance, Automotive Regions Alliance, European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, European Entrepreneurial Region, Knowledge Exchange Platform, Broadband Platform, Green Deal Going Local Working Group, Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform, COVID Platform, COR-UK Contact Group, Subsidiarity Monitoring Network, Covenant of Mayors, EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste, European Capital of Smart Tourism, Bio Regions and European Organic Awards, and that it also actively participates in networks established by other Union institutions, such as the Commission's F4F platform and the Cities and Regions for Integration of Migrants network;
23. Observes that, in 2021, the Committee's political priorities for its 2020-2025 mandate were the guiding principles, and that those priorities were accompanied by three communication campaigns, one on bringing Europe closer to its people, another on understanding and responding to the societal transformation brought on by digital, environmental and demographic challenges, and the third on social, economic and territorial cohesion as a fundamental value ensuring the Union is at the service of its people; points out that, to implement those priorities, strong working relationships have been built with Members of Parliament and its relevant committees and with European Commissioners and the thematic services of the Commission (DGs);
24. Observes the important contributions provided by the Committee to the drafting of Regulation (EU) 2021/1755⁴ that established the Brexit Adjustment Reserve and provided the legal foundation for the roll-out of a EUR 5,4 billion programme in the

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2021/1755 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 October 2021 establishing the Brexit Adjustment Reserve (OJ L 357, 8.10.2021, p. 1).

2021-2023 period to help regions deal with the economic and social consequences of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the Union;

25. Points out the Committee's key role in the design and implementation of the missions in the Horizon Europe programme by encouraging close alignment of the EUR 1,5 billion provided for those missions with the EUR 30 billion provided under the structural funds for implementing regional innovation strategies; understands that those missions address important policy challenges and set objectives to be achieved by 2030, such as making 150 regions and communities climate-resilient, establishing 100 climate-neutral and smart cities and creating 100 living labs to lead the transition towards healthy soils; welcomes the enhanced cooperation established by the Committee's rapporteur with the Commission's DGs and the follow-up planned on the mission's activities, such as the development of regional innovation ecosystems and smart specialisation strategies and pilot projects such as the European Research Area Hubs and the Green transition in the smart specialisation concept;
26. Welcomes the establishment of strategic co-operation in the implementation of the European Green Deal, such as the launch of the Green Deal Going Local campaign and others; points out, as part of the activities of the Committee's Green Deal Going Local working group, the enhanced cooperation with the Commission's DG for the Environment, which includes the setting up of a Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform in 2021;
27. Notes that, in January 2021, the Committee's broadband platform was relaunched jointly with the Commission in order to monitor the implementation of key Union initiatives on digital issues, including the European Digital Innovation Hubs as part of the Union's Digital Europe programme, with specific regard to Union funding for national, regional and local hubs to cover activities with a clear European added value; is aware that several opinions and publications of the Committee highlighted regional aspects of the Commission's 'Europe fit for the digital age' priority and that they had a significant impact on legislative proposals, such as the Digital Services Act⁵ and the Digital Markets Act⁶, and on the 2030 Digital Compass;
28. Notes that the adoption, in June 2021, of the Commission's long-term vision for the Union's rural areas resulted in considerable involvement of the Committee in the governance mechanism, in particular as regards Rural Pacts, and that the long term vision is in line with the rural agenda for the Union that the Committee has been advocating for since 2016; believes that that long-term vision provides a common framework for rural areas in the Union for engaging and cooperating at Union, national, regional and local level;
29. Believes that the inclusion of the local and regional level in implementing national recovery plans, through regular cooperation with the European Parliament's working group on the Recovery and Resilience Facility, will provide the opportunity to consider

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (OJ L 277, 27.10.2022, p. 1).

⁶ Regulation (EU) 2022/1925 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2022 on contestable and fair markets in the digital sector and amending Directives (EU) 2019/1937 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Digital Markets Act) (OJ L 265, 12.10.2022, p. 1).

the regional and local dimension when monitoring implementing actions;

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

30. Notes the Committee's new organisational chart that centralises financial initiation within a pool of excellence and streamlines the IT governance model to better allocate the limited IT resources;
31. Notes that, in 2021, the number of posts in the establishment plan amounted to 494, compared to 491 in 2020, and the total number of staff employed was 606, compared to 601 in 2020; notes the high occupation rate of 98 % in 2021, an increase compared to 96,3 % in 2020 and exceeding the target of at least 96% that was set for 2021-2022;
32. Remarks that the Committee resorts to hiring temporary and contract staff for mid-term and long-term replacements and for specific projects, and that there were 141 temporary and contract staff in 2021, compared to 125 and 121 in 2020 and 2019 respectively; believes that that situation entails the risk of considerable loss of institutional memory, knowledge and expertise for the Committee when those temporary employment contracts come to an end; invites the Committee further to deepen its administrative cooperation with the EESC via the joint services arrangement to enhance the synergic effects of pooling staff;
33. Calls on the Committee to explore synergies with other institutions, in terms of both logistics, digital services, driver's services and other administrative tasks, and certain outreach and communication activities, particularly in Member States where the Committee members have varied support networks and rely purely on their own local staff;
34. Notes that the overall gender ratio in the Committee's staff in 2021 was 56,8 % women in the overall staff, the same as in 2020; regrets the gender imbalance in senior management in 2021 with 62,5 % of such positions occupied by men and 37,5 % by women; equally regrets the gender imbalance in middle management, where the ratio is 68,4 % men and 31,6 % women; encourages the responsible for recruitment to thoroughly commit to making vacancy notices more inclusive and to encourage more women to apply for management positions, including by ensuring a balanced representation on selection boards and by offering training possibilities for female staff that wish to prepare for a managerial career and proposing more flexible arrangements;
35. Welcomes the diversity and inclusion strategy for the 2022-2027 period with its accompanying action plan and discussed in the Committee's commission for financial and administrative affairs and in the Committee's bureau in June 2022; observes that the strategy sets the short term target of 40 % women in management with main overarching goal of 50 % once the short term goal is achieved; reiterates its invitation to the Committee to be more ambitious in the annual action plans implementing that strategy;
36. Appreciates that among the measures expected in the diversity and inclusion strategy are a mentoring scheme for aspiring female managers, awareness raising workshops for managers on various equal opportunity-related topics and the close monitoring of statistics to enable the timely adoption of corrective measures; asks the Committee to report to Parliament on the progressive implementation of the action plan accompanying

the diversity and inclusion strategy with the support of the Committee's joint committee for diversity and inclusion; reiterates the call on the Committee to continue its efforts to achieve gender balance at all hierarchical levels;

37. Notes that the Committee employs officials from all Member States with the exception of one; encourages the Committee to continue to take action to reach a proper geographical distribution across all of its staff, with a particular focus on the management level; welcomes the initiatives to increase the visibility of its vacancies, publishing its notices on its website in order to increase chances for laureates from across the whole Union to apply, without any geographical discrimination; understands that all senior management posts are announced publicly, including via an extensive social media publicity campaign to ensure maximum outreach across all Member States; appreciates the use of staff ambassadors to generate a positive employer branding and that, as of 2021, the Committee increased its presence on social media and on on-line based recruitment platforms to advertise relevant vacant positions, mainly for non-permanent staff members or national experts, in addition to more traditional communication channels;
38. Stresses that the Committee, like all Union institutions, must ensure that all Member States are proportionally represented on the staff while at the same time it must respect the competences and merits of all candidates; urges the Committee to take steps towards achieving geographical balance of nationals from all Member States, reflecting their diversity, as indicated in Article 27 of the Staff Regulations of Officials;
39. Welcomes the continuous attention devoted to specific issues related to gender, such as the appointment, in 2021, on the occasion of the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia, of the first LGBTI+ contact person to assist colleagues who would like to discuss their personal experience working in the Committee or who have LGBTI+ family members; encourages the Committee to continue endorsing bottom-up initiatives that contribute to making the Committee a more inclusive workplace;
40. Welcomes the launching of a staff satisfaction survey, closed on 16 April 2021, that focused on staff satisfaction with respect to teleworking and the working environment that staff would like for the post-pandemic period, and understands that its results were taken into account with the adoption of even more flexible teleworking conditions in 2022;
41. Duly notes the Committee's commitment to modernise the HR framework and notes that the systems for teleworking were improved and a new hybrid working regime was prepared which is being tested in the Committee and the EESC's joint digital workplace pilot project; remarks that the project aims to define and share best practices with digital collaboration tools and is based on the concepts, also endorsed by Parliament in its previous discharge resolution, of results based management, digitalised work, telework on equal footing to work in the office, flexibility on the basis of a trust based system and the right to disconnect;
42. Welcomes that the new pilot project on teleworking offers staff the possibility to telework two to three days per week; notes that it also includes the concept of work-life balance and underlines the notion of the right to disconnect; observes that, in the

framework of the COVID-19 pandemic support actions, the Committee offered a lump sum of EUR 150-250 to staff in order to pay for any additional costs, including the purchase of ergonomic equipment;

43. Notes that, in 2021, the Committee prepared a new hybrid and flexible work regime together with the social partners, to be implemented in 2022; observes that that new regime foresees a wide range of part-time formulae, special part-time by time-credit in half-days and paid part-time subject to an ad hoc procedure in serious cases; notes that, in 2021, 118 decisions were taken with respect to 58 staff members benefitting from a flexible work regime, out of which 46 were women; remarks that parental leave and family leave are also possible and that 49 staff members, out of which 36 were women, benefitted from parental leave in 2021;
44. Notes that, in 2021, 14 burnout cases were reported (out of a total of 554 members of staff, compared to 12 possible cases of burnout reported in 2020) and acknowledges the Committee's personalised follow-up of absences; reiterates its recommendation for the Committee to keep the focus on primary prevention to reduce psychosocial risks and burnout as well as on the annual medical visits; appreciates, in this regard, that further training and courses are targeting physical well-being;
45. Notes that, on 26 April 2021, the Committee adopted Decision No 108/2021 on protecting dignity at work, managing conflict and combatting harassment; understands that that decision followed a lengthy dialogue with all concerned stakeholders, including the confidential counsellor network and the Committee's staff committee; appreciates that the new decision widens the scope, outlines the rules of conducts and the possible informal and formal conflict resolution mechanisms, and is endowed with a dedicated practical guide providing additional hands-on explanations; appreciates that, to raise awareness of that decision and its implications, info-sessions for staff and managers have been organised in addition to the regularly provided internal training courses on ethics and integrity;
46. Is aware that the Committee's Regulation No 3/2021 of 2 February 2021 provides for the payment of a flat-rate remote meeting allowance for members of the Committee, duly mandated alternates and rapporteurs' experts and speakers invited to attend remote or hybrid meetings, with the aim of compensating for general expenses incurred when preparing for and participating in such meetings; understands that that Regulation sets, for the whole of 2021, the criteria for payment and verification, quantifying the allowance at EUR 200 per day and stipulating that to qualify for the allowance, members must sign a declaration of participation and submit it to the members' financial service, enabling the administration to verify the attendance of the person in question; points out, however, that in accordance with the recent adoption in May 2022 of Decision No 15/2022 on the application of extraordinary measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, the meetings of the bodies of the Committee currently all take place in person;
47. Observes that the Committee welcomed a total of 58 trainees in 2021, out of which 48 were selected for a five month traineeship during which they received a monthly grant as well as a mobility allowance and reimbursement of their travel costs, 10 were short-term study visitors for shorter traineeship periods of one to four months, and three received a monthly income from the government of their country; welcomes the

Committee's commitment to propose teleworking arrangements for its trainees as well;

48. Reiterates its call on the Committee to integrate the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic in its internal management strategy in terms of business continuity and crisis management, IT responsiveness, resilience of the organisation, duty of care towards its staff, effective communication and flexible working processes, in order to develop a result-oriented management style that can encourage a healthy work-life balance;

Ethical framework and transparency

49. Reiterates its call on the Committee to reconsider its participation in the Transparency Register established by the Interinstitutional Agreement of 20 May 2021 between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on a mandatory transparency register⁷, which allows for the voluntary involvement of Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies other the signatory institutions, but does not cover the activities of regional and local authorities and the associations representing them; maintains its view on the limited validity of the Committee's Practical Guide on the interaction of staff with external entities, dating back to 2018, and reaffirms the importance of a high level of transparency with respect to lobbying meetings which might influence the Committee in its advisory role to the Union institutions; calls on the Committee to finalise its internal analysis of the available options and to join the Transparency Register;
50. Welcomes that, following Parliament's recommendations, the Committee has collected from its members and alternates the financial declarations that were in large part still missing (in January 2021, 146 financial declarations had still not been submitted despite the obligation to do so under the code of conduct which entered into force on 26 January 2020), meaning that in October 2022, 32 financial declarations were still missing out of a total of 629 appointed members and alternates; notes that out of the 32 missing declarations five concerned members appointed in 2022 who had not yet actively participated in the Committee's meetings, that the remaining 27 concerned alternates, 18 of whom were appointed in 2022, 2 in 2021 and 7 in 2020, and that, out of these alternates, only one person had participated in Committee activities (remotely and in 2021); encourages the Committee to follow up on any missing financial declarations and to pursue a strict policy to enforce transparency obligations;
51. Notes that with the adoption of a new decision on the training regime, ethics training has become mandatory rather than recommended, including refresher courses, which will pave the way to a more intense participation of staff in initiatives on ethical issues; observes that, in 2021, 14 training sessions specifically on ethics and integrity took place with 251 members of staff taking part (60 % of managers and 57,30 % of all staff, managers included) and that 34 training sessions covering whistle-blowing, conflicts of interest and harassment and 25 sessions covering different aspects of financial management, also raising awareness of conflicts of interest, were organised;
52. Observes that, in 2021, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) investigated two cases involving the Committee, the first a matter of possible payment of undue travel allowances and the second allegations of financial wrongdoings, harassment and mismanagement in a joint service of the Committee and the EESC; remarks that the

⁷ OJ L 207, 11.6.2021, p. 1.

former case was closed when the Committee requested the reimbursement of the paid allowance for ethical reasons, not having identified any legal basis to impose such reimbursement, and that the second case was dismissed by OLAF with a recommendation to the Committee and the EESC to carry out an internal investigation on harassment and mismanagement; asks the Committee to report to Parliament on the outcome of that investigation which was launched in 2021;

53. Regrets that the Committee has not adopted an anti-fraud strategy; calls on the Committee to launch an internal fraud risk analysis and to coordinate with the competent services of the Commission with a view to adopting an adequate internal anti-fraud strategy;
54. Calls for an end to the use of external companies that, according to Yale University's ranking⁸, continue to operate in Russia;

Digitalisation, cybersecurity and data protection

55. Remarks that the Committee spent EUR 6 112 846 on IT projects and IT equipment in 2021, compared to EUR 6 392 372 and EUR 4 033 320 in 2020 and 2019 respectively; underlines that the budget increase in 2021 and 2020 was largely due to unused appropriations transferred from other budget lines;
56. Is aware that budget transfers, however effective and timely, cannot replace the structural IT funding necessary for sound planning and programming of IT resources; is concerned by the underfunding, in particular for IT services, given that such underfunding means that a structured review cannot be carried out and, where needed, investment cannot be made in IT resources that are by definition longer-term and have maintenance over their entire lifetime; is concerned, in particular, because this can undermine cybersecurity and prevent the attraction and retention of the necessary IT expertise on the labour market;
57. Welcomes that the Committee significantly progressed towards full digitalisation of work processes, in particular electronic management of documents and their approval workflows, including ongoing work on full use of electronic signatures, management of financial actors, risk management and management of selection procedures or joint committees;
58. Notes that, in 2021, the Committee delivered several important projects to further digitalise its business processes and to facilitate the Committee members' political work, fostering multilingualism, streamlining, simplification and updating of existing business processes; observes that the Committee's digital future group brings together Committee members and Committee administration in order to discuss and advise on IT and digital matters and that the new administrative cooperation agreement with the EESC, which entered into force on 1 November 2021, fosters the exchange of good digital practices to drive its IT and digital services forward;
59. Notes the increasing number of cyber-threats to the IT infrastructure and online communication channels of the Committee, such as its external website; encourages the Committee to continue to pay a high level of attention to cybersecurity matters,

⁸ <https://som.yale.edu/story/2022/over-1000-companies-have-curtailed-operations-russia-some-remain>

strengthen its IT system and ensure a close cooperation with the Computer Emergency Response Team for the EU Institutions, bodies and agencies (CERT-EU) in order to enable the early identification of vulnerabilities and prevention and management of incidents and to raise cybersecurity awareness of its members and staff; encourages the Committee to carry out regular risk assessments of its IT infrastructure and to ensure regular audits and tests of its cyber defences;

60. Appreciates the Committee using open-source technology and, in 2021, the growing number of open-source libraries and frameworks used in the Committee's information systems and the new amendment processing applications based on open-source technologies;
61. Welcomes that the majority of technical systems are hosted internally and managed by internal staff;

Buildings and security

62. Notes that, on 10 May 2021, the budgetary authority approved the take-over of the rental contract, as per September 2021, by the Committee and the EESC of the former EEAS building at Belliard 100 (B100), the rental costs of which will be covered by the savings made as a result of the lower cost of renting the Van Maerlant (VMA) building compared to the cost of renting the buildings in Beillard 68 (B68) and Trèves 74 (TRE74), which were transferred to the Commission as of September 2022;
63. Understands that the additional surface in B100 building will not fully compensate for the loss of space that occurred following the exchange of the Committee and the EESC's B68 and TRE74 buildings for the Commission's VMA building, a loss which amounts to approximately 5 000m² compared to the situation at the beginning of 2021; acknowledges that such a loss cannot be entirely offset by alternative measures such as stepping up the office-space density of other buildings and increasing teleworking, but advises against entering into long-term commitments on new office space before such measures are fully explored;
64. Observes that, to accommodate staff in an appropriate working environment and conditions, modernisation and refurbishment of the offices was necessary in the BvS (Rue Montoyer 92-102), REM (Rue Belliard 93) and VMA buildings; notes that, on 1 December 2021, the tender for the renovation works was awarded for the execution of works in the VMA building at a total cost of EUR 9 million; notes that the main part of that cost, around EUR 6 million, was already available in the initial 2021 budget approved by the budgetary authority as a "one off" request for the year 2021 and that it was possible to save appropriations for an amount of EUR 3 million from other budget lines and to use them for the VMA refurbishment;

Environment and sustainability

65. Welcomes the study launched by the Committee in 2021 to define CO₂ reduction targets and scenarios and to propose measures in various areas with the goal of better implementation of the European Green Deal in the Committee;
66. Welcomes the positive environmental accomplishments in 2021, as regards electricity, water and paper consumption (reductions of 2,1 %, 14,3 % and 55 %, respectively,

compared to 2020); notes the installation of solar panels on two of the Committee's buildings and understands that further analysis is being carried out with the aim of extending the solar panel installation, likely in 2023;

67. Highlights that 75,8 % of the Committee staff use eco-friendly means of transport; encourages the Committee to implement a mobility policy which promotes the use of sustainable travel modes for commuting, encompasses carpooling, bicycle parking spaces and electric battery chargers, and considers a financial contribution, either for public transport expenses or for renouncing the use of car parking facilities;

Interinstitutional cooperation

68. Is aware of the robust cooperation with the EESC, via the joint services where some 460 members of staff (of which approximately 170 belonging to the Committee) and more than EUR 55million yearly (of which approximately EUR 24 million comes from the Committee) are pooled together by both committees; welcomes the current administrative cooperation agreement between the Committee and the EESC, that entered into force on 1 November 2021 with a duration of five years; believes that the current administrative cooperation agreement will contribute substantially to reinforce governance of the cooperation and the control mechanisms and is a renewed expression of the will to efficiently share resources and create synergies; notes that the current administrative cooperation agreement includes the creation of a directorate for innovation and information technology and, within the already existing joint services, the establishment of a centralised public procurement and financial management unit and a procurement expert group;
69. Observes that the Committee also cooperates with the Commission (for an annual fee) in the handling of staff pension and departure files (the Paymaster Office) and individual protocol rights (Directorate-General for Human Resources), training of staff (Directorate-General for Human Resources), early childhood centres and approved day nurseries (Office for Infrastructure and Logistics), use of various IT platforms (the ABAC management and information system, including its accounting system and assets, as well as contract modules, NAP for salary calculations and the SYSPER 2 personnel management and information system) (Directorates-General for Budget and Informatics), and publications in the *Official Journal of the European Union* (as of 2020 included in the Commission's budget);
70. Observes that the Committee organises preparatory and follow-up (so called bilateral) meetings for its rapporteurs with Parliament, the Commission and the Council on its opinions, and that regular exchanges occur between the rapporteurs of the Committee and of Parliament on parallel dossiers; encourages the Committee to continue boosting its ability to provide evidence from the ground to the principal Union institutions using data, empirical analyses and compilations of best practice;
71. Appreciates the involvement of Committee members in the entire political and legislative cycle of Union policies, either via an early input into the policy-agenda setting of the Commission or through an increased follow-up of its opinions to the co-legislators and in partnership with the Commission's services on the roll-out and evaluation of policies and legislation; encourages the Committee to further promote its achievements in the legislative cycle;

72. Understands that the Committee has asked the Union institutions directly involved in legislation to grant the Committee access to the four-column document for specific legislative files so that the Committee can play its advisory role not only at the beginning of the legislative process but also at the stage of the trilogues; notes that this request is still pending and that the Committee is considering taking legal action if access is not granted; asks to be kept informed about the development of any dialogue on that matter;
73. Is aware of the inter-institutional work carried out in 2021 with Parliament on the pilot project 'Building Europe with Local Councillors', which expresses the Committee's efforts to bring its support to local and regional authorities that are not officially represented in the Committee on matters related to opportunities *vis-à-vis* the Union; understands that the objective is to have at least one councillor responsible for Union affairs in each of the 120 000 regional and local councils in the Union and that, until today, the European Network of Regional and Local EU Councillors has about 2 000 members;
74. Is aware that the Committee holds its plenary sessions in the premises of Parliament and the Commission to compensate for the lack of capacity in its own conference rooms; notes that the Committee also buys interpreting services from the Commission (Directorate-General for Interpretation) and Parliament, rather than having its own interpreting service;
75. Reiterates the position expressed in the previous discharge recommendations on the need to fully implement the cooperation agreement between Parliament, the Committee and the EESC of 5 February 2014 according to which a total of 60 translators, including 24 from the Committee, were transferred to Parliament in exchange for access to the services of the European Parliamentary Research Service; is aware that the Committee has requested an additional EUR 1,24 million in its draft budget for 2023 for the budget line 1400 Other staff, on top of the normal budget and as a way to compensate for the unbalanced effect of the implementation of that cooperation agreement, with a view to hiring 19 additional contract agents in 2023.
76. Welcomes the continuously increasing cooperation with Parliament, despite the restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, via bilateral cooperation on a set of selected priority files which are reviewed and updated every year; underlines that regular meetings between the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the two institutions, and structured cooperation between the rapporteurs of both institutions, as well as between the Committee's commissions and Parliament's committees, increased throughout 2021; encourages the Committee to further engage in cooperation with Parliament;
77. Observes that, in 2021, the Committee continued its close cooperation with the trio of Council presidencies and the then Council presidency and issued four opinions based on referrals received from the Council presidency; notes that the Committee has also developed cooperation initiatives with the General-Secretariat of the Council on thematic priority files by presenting opinions and documents in the respective working parties of the Council.

Communication

78. Notes that, in 2021, the budget assigned for communication was around EUR 2,1 million, of which approximately EUR 400 000 was used for events, EUR 800 000 for media and EUR 900 000 for web, social media and digital content; appreciates that the Committee measured double-digit percentage increases in press and social media outreach between 2020 and 2021, thanks to an internal reallocation of resources, which showed in its increased outreach; notes that the Committee is not likely to be able to do the same in the following years due to tighter budgetary constraints;
79. Observes that the Committee's leading principles for enhancing its role and for better communication thereof are centred on increased involvement throughout all stages of the Union legislative process and on building more effective and trustful partnerships with other Union Institutions;
80. Welcomes the establishment of a key performance indicator system to measure and monitor the effects of the Committee's communication, aligning communication priorities with political priorities and boosting decentralised communication through multiple initiatives, such as the digital masterclasses for its members, the development of a newsletter concept and the establishment of networks to strengthen relations with former members and trainees of the Committee and others;
81. Notes the many networking initiatives in 2021, such as the Ukraine Working Group that launched a peer-to-peer initiative on transparency, the Zero-Pollution Stakeholder Platform jointly launched with the Commission to mainstream the zero-pollution agenda and the implementation of the Union's Zero-Pollution Action Plan, the common IT platform for the Young Elected Politicians scheme and the digital platform 'Let's get digital' to facilitate networking among the participating communication professionals from local, regional, national and Union authorities;
82. Agrees that the web streaming of the Committee's statutory meetings in all Union languages has fostered the general visibility of the Committee, and that the regional and local Barometer made available via the Union's open data portal, data.europa.eu, increases visibility among specialists;
83. Encourages the Committee to continue the systematic publication in the interinstitutional database of all its studies and welcomes the possibility, expected as of 2021 in the framework contracts for studies and external expertise, to include visuals and social media sharable content to strengthen the communication and outreach of final products;
84. Notes that the Committee is currently present on the most popular proprietary social media platforms; encourages the Committee to use decentralised social network alternatives to very large online platforms, such as the Mastodon platform; shares the Committee's view that strengthening the use of more privacy-friendly alternative platforms, rather than the predominant mainstream ones, would make a statement in terms of data protection and digital sovereignty;
85. Encourages the Committee to engage with the European Data Protection Supervisor, with a view to utilising the two open-source social media platforms, EU Voice and EU Video, that were launched as a public pilot project to promote the use of free and open-source social networks;

86. Reiterates its call on the Committee to increase its communication efforts to strengthen the link with citizens by endorsing greater transparency in its operations, by intensifying the use of digital technologies and by pursuing a communication strategy that allows the correct perception and understanding of the Committee's role and of the way it fits into the Union's vision.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

Date adopted	28.2.2023
Result of final vote	+: 23 -: 3 0: 1
Members present for the final vote	Gilles Boyer, Olivier Chastel, Caterina Chinnici, Corina Crețu, Ryszard Czarnecki, José Manuel Fernandes, Luke Ming Flanagan, Daniel Freund, Isabel García Muñoz, Monika Hohlmeier, Jean-François Jalkh, Mislav Kolakušić, Joachim Kuhs, Alin Mituța, Jan Olbrycht, Markus Pieper, Michèle Rivasi, Sándor Rónai, Petri Sarvamaa, Eleni Stavrou, Angelika Winzig, Lara Wolters, Tomáš Zdechovský
Substitutes present for the final vote	Eider Gardiazabal Rubial, Elżbieta Rafalska
Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote	Fabienne Keller, Katrin Langensiepen

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

23	+
ECR	Ryszard Czarnecki, Elżbieta Rafalska
PPE	José Manuel Fernandes, Monika Hohlmeier, Jan Olbrycht, Petri Sarvamaa, Eleni Stavrou, Angelika Winzig, Tomáš Zdechovský
Renew	Gilles Boyer, Olivier Chastel, Fabienne Keller, Alin Mituța
S&D	Caterina Chinnici, Corina Crețu, Isabel García Muñoz, Eider Gardiazabal Rubial, Sándor Rónai, Lara Wolters
The Left	Luke Ming Flanagan
Verts/ALE	Daniel Freund, Katrin Langensiepen, Michèle Rivasi

3	-
ID	Jean-François Jalkh, Joachim Kuhs
NI	Mislav Kolakušić

1	0
PPE	Markus Pieper

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention