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REPORT

on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2022, Section VII – Committee of the Regions
(2023/2136(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 2022, Section VII – Committee of the Regions (2023/2136(DEC))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2022¹,
 - having regard to the consolidated annual accounts of the European Union for the financial year 2022 (COM(2023)0391 – C9-0255/2023)²,
 - having regard to the Committee of the Regions’ annual activity report for 2022 and its report on budgetary and financial management for the financial year 2022,
 - having regard to the Court of Auditors’ annual report on the implementation of the budget concerning the financial year 2022, 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 2022, 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 (A9-0073/2024),
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 2022;

¹ OJ L 45, 24.2.2022.

² OJ C, C/2023/2, 12.10.2023.

³ OJ C, C/2023/103, 4.10.2023.

⁴ OJ C, C/2023/112, 12.10.2023.

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 Secretary-General of 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 2022, Section VII – Committee of the Regions (2023/2136(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 2022, 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 (A9-0073/2024),
- A. 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;
- B. whereas the Committee of the Regions (the ‘Committee’) is a political assembly of 329 members elected in the regions, cities, villages and municipalities of the 27 Member States of the Union, 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;
- C. whereas the consultation of the Committee by the Commission or the Council is mandatory in certain cases, 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;
- D. 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 the 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 Union;
- E. whereas 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 legislation, improves ownership and more effectively pursues the benefit of citizens;

¹ OJ C 324, 1.10.2020, p. 8.

- F. whereas the Committee pursues its political goal of strengthening its involvement in the entire Union political and legislative cycle while making more tangible the connection with Union citizens that use the Committee's members as powerful multipliers in their communities and in their national associations of local and regional authorities;
- G. whereas the over 400 national and regional programmes in place for the delivery of the Union cohesion policy in the 2021-2027 programming period will make available approximately EUR 380 billion, under different funds, to tackle the economic, social and environmental challenges that regions, cities, villages and municipalities in the Union are facing;
- H. whereas, as an 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;
1. Notes that the budget of the Committee falls under MFF heading 7 'European public administration', which amounted to a total of EUR 11,6 billion in 2022, i.e. 5,9 % of Union budget spending; notes that, in 2022, the budget of the Committee represented 0,95 % of MFF heading 7;
 2. Notes that the Court of Auditors (the 'Court') in its Annual Report for the financial year 2022 examined a sample of 60 transactions under Administration, the same number as were examined in 2021; further notes that the Court writes that administrative expenditure comprises expenditure on human resources, including expenditure on pensions, which in 2022 accounted for about 70 % of the total administrative expenditure, and expenditure on buildings, equipment, energy, communications and information technology, and that its work over many years indicates that, overall, this spending is low risk;
 3. Notes that, as part of its audit for 2022, the Court, examined the supervisory and control systems of the Committee, in particular the implementation of internal control standards, risk management and the functioning of key controls defined in the Financial Regulation, including *ex ante* and *ex post* controls on payments;
 4. Notes that 14 (23 %) of the 60 transactions contained errors but that the Court, based on the five errors which were quantified, estimates the level of error to be below the materiality threshold;
 5. Notes with satisfaction that the Court, in its Annual Report for the financial year 2022, states that it did not identify any specific issues concerning the Committee;

Budgetary and financial management

6. Notes that, in 2022, the final adopted budget for the Committee amounted to EUR 109 976 858, including Amending Budget 5/2022, representing an overall increase of 3,03 % compared to 2021; notes that the appropriations on budget line 1004 for 'travel and subsistence allowances, attendance at meetings and associated expenditure' increased from EUR 4 244 488 to EUR 8 158 838, i.e. by 92 %, between 2021 and 2022, owing to the resumption of travel after the COVID-19 pandemic; notes that,

otherwise, the distribution of appropriations across budget lines in the 2022 budget remained comparable to previous years' distribution;

7. Notes that the missions' budget for 2022 amounted to EUR 419 657, compared to EUR 169 856 in 2021, i.e. an increase of 147 %, which can be explained by the number of online meetings in 2021 and at the beginning of 2022 due to the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the increase in travel prices in 2022; notes that the allowance for the Committee's Presidency (President and 1st Vice-President) for travel and meeting expenses, which are financed from the general budget for Members expenses, increased from EUR 49 852 to EUR 71 810, i.e. an increase of 44 %, between 2021 and 2022; welcomes the guidance towards a more cost effective, purposeful and sustainable mission policy that was circulated in June 2022 with a view to reducing the Committee's staff missions to a minimum;
8. Notes that the budget implementation rate was 99,2 % in 2022, which is slightly higher than in 2021, when the budget implementation rate was 98,9 %;
9. Notes that the average time for payment in 2022 was 17,87 days, which is higher than in 2021 when it was 16,11 days; notes that, at the same time, the percentage of electronic invoicing increased from 32 % to 68 %; remarks that there is no correlation between the two figures and calls on the Committee to complete the digitalisation of the payment workflow aiming to improve its efficiency and timeliness;
10. Notes that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine created budgetary pressure for the Committee, including through rising inflation and salary adjustments, strongly increasing energy costs and the cost of construction and raw materials; notes further that the Committee mobilised its political support to Ukrainian local and regional authorities and organised activities in relation to the war against Ukraine, which had an impact on the budget for missions, studies and trainings;
11. Notes that the Committee's own services organised 14 procurement calls for tenders in 2022, including 11 negotiated procurement procedures for remote interpretation services in the Member States; notes that procurement procedures in the field of logistics were launched by the joint services that the Committee shares with the European Economic and Social Committee (the 'EESC');

Internal management, performance and internal control

12. Notes that the Committee contributes to the Union policy and decision making process from the perspective of the regional and local authorities within the Union and provides a framework to enhance cooperation between the local, regional, national and European levels and to bring Europe closer to its citizens; welcomes the relevance of the contribution of the Committee to important Union topics such as the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility as reflected in Parliament's resolution of 23 June 2022 on the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility²; further encourages the Committee to assist its members in participating in local dialogues with citizens on European matters;
13. Notes that the Committee pursues its mission through opinions, which refer to

² OJ C 32, 27.1.2023, p. 42.

legislative proposals made by the Commission (referrals), own-initiative opinions, which call on the Union institutions to take action, and resolutions, which highlight the Committee's position on specific topics; notes that, in 2022, the Committee adopted 55 opinions and 8 resolutions which is slightly lower than in 2021 when the Committee adopted 60 opinions and 9 resolutions; 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;

14. Welcomes that the Committee took concrete steps to strengthen its involvement in the entire Union political and legislative cycle in line with its prerogatives under the Treaties; welcomes, in particular, the cooperation agreement between Parliament and the Committee and the close cooperation between the Committee and several parliamentary committees, intergroups and directorates-general; notes that, in 2022, the Committee organised 56 preparatory and follow-up meetings with Parliament for the rapporteurs of its opinions; notes further that 20 Committee rapporteurs intervened in Parliament's committee meetings in 2022; congratulates the Committee for strengthening its involvement in legislative trilogues, notably by being granted access to trilogue documents; considers that members of the Committee and of the EESC should be invited to relevant parliamentary exchanges, including committee meetings, on issues they are dealing with;
15. Welcomes the measures taken by the Committee throughout 2022 to optimise its resources and to improve cost-effectiveness while increasing the impact of its political work in the context of the 'Going for IMPact' programme and in particular the 43 simplification and digitalisation projects that contribute to the modernisation of the Committee's administration and to the digitalisation of workflows as part of the 'Strategy on the simplification of Committee rules and procedures for the period 2020-2025';
16. Welcomes the active involvement of the Committee in the works of the Conference on the Future of Europe ('CoFE') with a delegation of 30 members, 12 of whom represented the European associations of local and regional authorities; notes that, following the work performed in 2021, in 2022 the Committee organised 14 meetings with CoFE delegates and 9 preparatory meetings; highlights that the Committee created a dedicated task force, 'Conference on the Future of Europe', to coordinate the work of all directorates and units involved; notes that proposals contained in the final report of the CoFE, issued on 9 May 2022, were taken up in the Committee's project 'Tapping into the regional and local authorities' potential to strengthen the EU', which was implemented throughout 2022;
17. Underlines that in its final report, the plenary assembly of the CoFE in its 40th recommendation, under measure 3, calls for a reform the Committee, encompassing adequate channels of dialogue for regions as well as cities, villages and municipalities, giving it an enhanced role in the institutional architecture, if matters with a territorial impact are concerned;
18. Notes that, in 2022, the Committee reviewed and strengthened its internal control framework at the levels of planning and reporting, systems, financial verification and sensitive functions; congratulates the Committee for developing the dedicated convergence tool and platform for planning, reporting, risk assessment and business

continuity; notes that the new sensitive posts policy entered into force on 1 January 2022 and was communicated to staff on 27 January 2022;

19. Notes that, until April 2022, all meetings were held online, whereas as of April 2022 statutory meetings are organised in physical presence while other meetings may be organised remotely or in hybrid format; notes that, until the revision of the Committee's rules of procedure in 2023, a flat-rate meeting allowance of EUR 200 for remote and hybrid meetings continued to be paid according to the rules in place since 2021; notes that as of July 2023 the remote meeting allowance is set at 50 % of the standard meeting allowance (i.e. currently 50 % of EUR 359, equalling EUR 179,50); considers that remote attendance is an important instrument for modern institutions given that, inter alia, it reduces the costs of meetings and allows broader participation, especially during crisis situations as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic; notes with satisfaction that the recommendations of the internal audit on the adequacy of the planning and management of allowances and reimbursements to members for attendances at meetings were satisfactorily implemented;

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

20. Notes that, at the end of 2022, the Committee had a total of 533 members of staff, compared to 547 in 2021 and 537 in 2020; notes that 56 contract agents and 89 temporary agents were employed by the Committee at the end of 2022, out of which 21 contract agents had an indefinite contract and three temporary agents were employed in a temporary position, in two cases with an indefinite contract and, in the case of the Secretary-General, for a fixed duration of five years; notes, in addition, that the Committee employed 8 interim agents and 14 external members of staff working on-site, excluding external service providers in the fields of logistics and IT; notes, in 2022, that the occupation rate of the posts in the establishment plan was 96 %;
21. Notes that a new pilot project on a hybrid working regime, aiming to align the HR framework to new ways of working, entered into force in April 2022, providing the possibility for Committee staff to organise their weekly and daily work with a high degree of flexibility and to telework up to 60 % of their working time; welcomes that the new regime allows for the possibility of a number of part-time formulas based on the statutory rights provided in the Staff Regulation; notes with satisfaction that 90,25 % of those that responded to the staff survey of December 2022 indicated their satisfaction with those flexible arrangements;
22. Notes with concern that 16 cases of burnout were reported in the Committee in 2022; notes further that the Committee managed to reintegrate 15 members of staff in 2022 after long-term absence as a result of burnout, thanks to a personalised follow-up of long-term sickness leave; welcomes the preventive actions taken by the Committee to reduce psychosocial risks and burnout; appreciates in this regard the proactive approach of the medical service and the awareness-raising conferences, trainings and courses organized by the Committee;
23. Notes that the Committee continued to raise awareness about the measures put in place to combat harassment in the workplace in accordance with its Decision of 26 April 2021 on protecting dignity at work, managing conflict and combatting harassment, notably through dedicated guidance, internal communication and the organisation of several

information sessions for staff and managers; notes that, in 2022, the Committee had to deal with a new allegation of psychological harassment by a member of staff of the EESC against a member of staff of the Committee which allegation is still under examination by both committees; calls on the Committee to report on the follow-up to that allegation, notably taking into account the inter-institutional perspective;

24. Notes that, at the end of 2022, the Committee was employed 56,8 % women and 43,2 % men, compared to 56,6 % women in 2021 and 55,5 % women in 2020; notes with concerns that the distribution of women across grades and status follows the same trend as in previous years and regrets that, despite the appointment of a new female director in 2023 and some efforts to attract more women to management positions, the situation remains particularly unbalanced both at senior and middle management levels; recommends that vacancy notices are made more inclusive and that more women are encouraged to apply for senior and middle management positions, including by ensuring a balanced representation on selection boards, by offering training opportunities for female staff that wishes to prepare for a managerial career and by proposing more flexible work arrangements;
25. Welcomes that, on 7 July 2022, the Committee adopted a new five-year diversity and inclusion strategy and action plan for 2022-2026; encourages the Committee to pursue its efforts to reach the targets set out in that strategy and action plan, notably the gender equality target of 40 % of women in senior management positions by 2024 with the introduction of parity as the ultimate goal; welcomes the awareness-raising and the targeted measures put in place to promote and enhance a more diverse and inclusive workplace at the level of staff representation and contact points across all Committee departments under the coordination of a dedicated diversity and inclusion coordinator;
26. Notes that, in 2022, the Committee employed members of staff representing all Union nationalities and one member of staff of Ukrainian nationality; notes that, while welcoming the Committee's efforts to balance the geographical distribution among its staff, geographical balance has still not been reached as some nationalities continue to be overrepresented compared to others; encourages the Committee to continue to take action to reach a proper geographical distribution within its staff with a particular focus on the management level; welcomes the participation of the Committee in the interinstitutional taskforce on geographical balance which aims at sharing best practices and creating synergies among Union institutions;
27. Notes that, in 2022, the Committee ran, for the first time, a pilot interinstitutional job shadowing scheme involving three Union institutions and 25 participants, aiming at increasing the understanding of the working methods and processes of other institutions, reinforcing interinstitutional collaboration, promoting mobility and providing for a more flexible workforce; congratulates the Committee for launching this innovative interinstitutional initiative which was then scaled up and taken over by the European School of Administration as of 2023;
28. Notes that the Committee had 60 trainees in 2022 of whom 48 were remunerated trainees and 12 were study visitors, in two cases receiving a social allowance; welcomes the new rules approved in 2022 in relation to the remuneration of trainees, whereby study visits can only be approved if either the trainee receives funding from another source or the traineeship is mandatory in the context of the trainee's studies and

whereby all types of trainees can request a social allowance in duly justified cases; welcomes that trainees' working conditions are aligned to those of the staff under the new flexible working arrangements, meaning that trainees may telework from abroad one day per month of the traineeship;

Ethical framework and transparency

29. Welcomes the Committee's efforts to enhance ethical awareness among its staff and the Committee's enforcement of ethics rules in different procedures, such as recruitment, and of ethical obligations and rights in different administrative situations, such as outside activities, training and leaving the service, as a follow-up to the internal audit on staff awareness of ethics; notes that the basic documents and rules underlying the ethical framework are published on the Committee's intranet in order to raise staff awareness about ethics rules; notes further that 14 collective training courses were organised by the Committee specifically on ethics-related topics in 2022, reaching 107 members of staff, and that 75 % of staff attended the general ethics training course throughout 2022;
30. Notes that, in 2022, the Committee continued the implementation of its 2020 code of conduct for members and, in that respect, intensified its efforts to collect missing financial declarations of members; notes that six alternate members appointed in January 2020 had still failed to submit their financial declarations by June 2023 and that, although none of those six members had attended any meeting of the Committee since their appointment, the Committee launched the enforcement procedure laid down in the members' code of conduct;
31. Notes that the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) investigated three cases in 2022 out of which one case was new and concerned outside gainful activities and two cases were ongoing and closed that same year and concerned respectively undue payment of travel allowances and allegations of financial wrongdoings, harassment and mismanagement in a joint service of the Committee and the EESC; notes that the case concerning the payment of undue travel allowances was closed at the beginning of 2022 with the request by the Committee to the member in question to reimburse the allowance received for ethical reasons in the absence of a legal basis to recover such amounts; notes that, at the beginning of 2024, the member in question communicated his intention to reimburse the amount initially requested by OLAF for ethical reasons, and that the Committee's financial services were ready to take all necessary steps in this regard; asks the Committee to inform the discharge authority of the Committee's follow-up to this case in accordance with the statutory obligations of staff under the Staff Regulations, in particular because the case involved a member of the Committee who was, at the same time, an accredited parliamentary assistant with Brussels as the contractual place of work, meaning that there was no need for travel expenses for meetings of the Committee taking place in Brussels; notes that the case concerning allegations of financial wrongdoings, harassment and mismanagement in a joint service gave rise to a conflict-management exercise involving the persons concerned, their hierarchy and the respective HR departments with a five-point action plan which was implemented throughout 2021 and 2022;
32. Notes that, in 2022, the Committee continued to implement transparency measures such as the publication of members' declarations of financial interest on its website but did not formally join the EU Transparency Register set up 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 register (IIA)³; is aware that new transparency measures focusing on office-holding members and rapporteurs, in line with the principles of the EU Transparency Register, were adopted by the Committee in a decision taken by its bureau in July 2023 and notified to the Management Board of the EU Transparency Register; notes that, on 20 November 2023, the Management Board of the EU Transparency Register considered the transparency measures consistent with the objectives pursued by the IIA and welcomed the Committee's regulation as an important step in further strengthening the joint framework and fostering a common transparency culture at Union level; welcomes that the Committee formally joined the EU Transparency Register as from 1 January 2024;

33. Notes that, in 2022, the Committee did not detect any conflicts of interest, which would have required a follow-up by the administration; notes that the Committee continued to rely on the rules in place to prevent conflicts of interest and avoid revolving doors between the public and the private sector and to promote them through ethics trainings and awareness raising;
34. Notes that no cases of whistleblowing were reported to the Committee in 2022; notes that the Committee continued to rely on the measures in place since 2015 concerning whistleblowing and to promote them through ethics trainings and awareness raising;
35. Regrets that the Committee has not adopted an internal anti-fraud strategy; reiterates its call on the Committee in the discharge resolution for 2021 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;

Digitalisation, cybersecurity and data protection

36. Notes that the combined IT budget of the Committee and the EESC amounted to EUR 11 712 000 in 2022, including a reinforcement of EUR 750 000 by an internal budget transfer during the year, compared to EUR 12 860 000 in 2021, i.e. a decrease of 9 %;
37. Notes that the Committee has a digital strategy aiming to provide IT services according to the best practices of IT management while optimising the use of human and financial resources; notes that the Committee worked on the adaptation and development of several strategic IT tools throughout 2022, aiming to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the political work of the Committee and of its administrative processes and workflows; notes that the main IT infrastructure project in 2022 concerned an adaptation of the network typology required for the new computer room in the Jacques Delors Building (JDE) in line with the hybrid cloud roadmap;
38. Notes that the Committee increased the amount of hybrid meetings in 2022 in order to adapt to hybrid work and to align its practices to the new guidance towards a more cost effective, purposeful and sustainable missions policy circulated in June 2022 by the Secretary-General of the Committee which requires the Committee to optimise its way of working and replace as many staff missions as possible by video-conferencing; understands that this new way of working required a technical upgrade in terms of equipment for hybrid meeting rooms;

39. Notes that the Committee adopted new internal rules on data protection in 2022 that contain restrictions of certain rights of data subjects in relation to the processing of personal data in the context of activities and procedures carried out by the Committee; notes further that the European Data Protection Supervisor did not conduct any investigation or enquiry with respect to the processing of personal data by the Committee in 2022;
40. Notes that the Committee did not encounter any cyber-attacks in 2022; notes that the Committee and the EESC's new joint directorate for innovation and information technology is composed of three units, namely digital transformation, digital solutions and digital platforms; notes that the unit for digital platforms is responsible, inter alia, for cybersecurity; asks the Committee to inform the discharge authority on how the creation of this new structure contributed to enhancing the cybersecurity preparedness of its staff, in line with the NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) cybersecurity framework and in cooperation with the Cybersecurity Service for the Union's institutions, bodies and agencies (CERT-EU); encourages the Committee to raise the cybersecurity awareness of their Members and staff, to carry out regular risk assessments of its IT infrastructure and to ensure regular audits and tests of its cyber defences;
41. Welcomes the efforts of the Committee to foster open source technology in its own systems, notably the main operational applications used for managing the political work of the Committee (Agora and Phoenix); notes further that the Committee tracks the use of open source technologies in its annual IT portfolio so that they are applied to new applications;

Buildings

42. Notes that the Committee and the EESC lost 5 000 m² in office space following the take-over of the rental contract of the former EEAS building at Belliard 100 (B100), which took effect in September 2021, and the buildings exchange between the Committee and the EESC's Belliard 68 and Trèves 74 and the Commission's Van Maerlant 2 (VMA), which took effect in September 2022; notes that fitting-out works in the two newly acquired buildings were necessary to enable a denser use of the office space; welcomes the establishment, in 2022, of a joint task force on new ways of working to reflect on possible optimisation of the way work is organised and how office space is used while reducing the environmental footprint;
43. Notes that, in 2022, the overall Committee budget for the fitting-out of premises amounted to EUR 883 792; notes that the renovation works undertaken by the Committee and the EESC on the B100 and the VMA buildings integrated the use of smart technologies with a strong environmental component; asks the Committee to provide an update on the return on investment of those technological installations, but advises caution nonetheless against entering long-term commitments on new office space before these measures are fully explored;
44. Notes that, in 2022, the building strategy of the Committee and the EESC focused on the geographical concentration of the buildings which was achieved by physically connecting all the buildings used by the Committee and the EESC to their main building (JDE); welcomes the new physical connection to Parliament's buildings which became

operational in November 2022, offering a more direct, easier and 125 m shorter pathway between the buildings of the Committee and the EESC and the buildings of Parliament;

45. Notes that the Committee and the EESC launched a multi-annual project related to the technical upgrade of the interpretation system for all conference rooms starting in 2022; notes that an amount of EUR 200 000 was earmarked by the Committee for this project in 2022;
46. Welcomes the commitment of the Committee and the EESC to systematically apply the ‘design for all’ principle to their infrastructure, ensuring accessibility of their building by design; notes that the Committee and the EESC took a range of different measures to ensure accessibility of their buildings for people with various kinds of disabilities;

Environment and sustainability

47. Welcomes the sustainable practices and notably the paperless approach of the Committee and the EESC which contributed to reduce their environmental footprint in line with their digital strategy; notes that the Phoenix application used to support the political work of the Committee was adapted in 2022 so as to generate the carbon reports for travel and allow the Committee and the EESC to calculate their carbon balance; notes that the action plan resulting from the audit on the performance under the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) was implemented with actions in the fields of documentation, review of procedures, improvement of planning, risk management and supervision; congratulates the Committee and the EESC on having exceeded the EMAS objectives for 2021-2025, except the objectives related to gas consumption;
48. Notes that, in 2022, the total electricity production generated by solar panels on the buildings of the Committee and the EESC was approximately 15,5 MWh, representing 0,25 % of the total yearly consumption of the Committee and the EESC; notes that, as of 16 September 2022, only the JDE was equipped with solar panels; is aware that due to administrative procedures the Committee and the EESC will face a delay before being able to extend their solar panel installation;
49. Notes that the Committee put in place a sustainable mobility plan including a financial contribution to the public transport subscriptions of staff and awareness raising activities; notes that no new mobility staff survey was organised in 2022 but one is foreseen for 2024; welcomes the fact that 76 % of the Committee staff uses eco-friendly means of transport for commuting purposes;

Interinstitutional cooperation

50. Welcomes the budgetary and administrative savings achieved through interinstitutional cooperation, in particular the close cooperation established at administrative level with the EESC with which the Committee shares premises and joint services in the areas of translation, infrastructure, logistics and IT, while maintaining its full institutional autonomy; notes that, on 1 October 2022, a joint directorate for innovation and information technology was created as part of the new cooperation agreement signed between the Committee and the EESC in 2022; notes further that 470 members of staff and EUR 55 million were pooled together by the Committee and the EESC in 2022,

excluding salary-related expenditure; calls on the Committee to pursue and expand that cooperation in other areas with a view to avoiding duplication and further rationalising the operating costs of services available in the premises shared by the Committee and the EESC; invites the Committee and the EESC to explore the possibility of setting up a single administration for their joint services, keeping separate directorates or units for the services dealing with matters related to their specific and independent mandates;

51. Welcomes the Committee's search for synergies by purchasing services from other institutions through service-level agreements and by participating in interinstitutional coordination bodies and interinstitutional procurement procedures;
52. Calls on the Committee to keep explore synergies with other institutions both in terms of logistics, digital services, driver's service and other administrative tasks, as well as certain outreach and communication activities, particularly in Member States where the Committee's members have varied support networks and rely purely on the members' own local staff;
53. Welcomes the willingness of the Committee to further develop its cooperation with other institutions, in particular Parliament, ahead of the 2024 European elections through a roadmap predicting a further intensification of cooperation and a bigger role for the Committee and local and regional authorities in that context; notes the review of the cooperation agreements with Parliament and the Commission, as decided by the Conference of Presidents in November 2022;
54. Notes that the Committee cooperates with the Commission (for an annual fee) for the handling of HR matters and the use of various IT platforms for financial management and HR; notes that the Committee holds its plenary sessions at the premises of Parliament and the Commission to compensate for the lack of capacity of its own conference rooms and that the Committee buys interpreting services from those two institutions; notes that the Committee has been looking into the possibilities of using distant interpretation facilities in view of the fast development of that sector;
55. Notes that the Committee promotes the visibility and impact of its work based on inter-institutional cooperation through targeted presentations of its reports to other institutions, e.g. presentations of 11 reports to Parliament in 2022, bilateral meetings at rapporteur level, political exchanges during formal events and conferences, targeted distribution of opinions and work in networks;

Communication

56. Notes that, in 2022, the Committee's overall budget for communication was EUR 2,2 million, compared to EUR 2,1 million in 2021, i.e. an increase of 4 %; notes that, within that budget, approximately EUR 439 000 was used for events, EUR 795 000 for media and EUR 1 099 000 for digital communication; notes that the aim of the Committee's communication is to raise the Committee's institutional and political profile as the assembly of the Union's regions, cities, villages and municipalities and the role of its members;
57. Notes that the Committee continued to host the regular meetings of the directors-general for communication of all Union institutions in 2022, focusing on the preparation of coordinated communication actions in the run up to the European elections in 2024;

encourages the Committee to continue its support to the institutional communication campaign of Parliament for the European elections in 2024 through its local and regional networks;

58. Welcomes the data-driven communication strategy developed by the Committee to close the gap with Union citizens at local and regional levels using multiplication channels, such as the European networks of regional and local counsellors that had 2 037 registered members at the end of 2022 and the programme for young elected politicians with 775 participants in events in 2022, i.e. an increase of 15 % as compared to 2021; notes that the Committee also provided trainings and capacity building for local and regional authorities on citizen engagement and participatory democracy called ‘A new chapter for participatory democracy’; notes that, in November 2022, the bureau of the Committee invited every member to hold at least one dialogue in their constituency every year; notes that the Committee established synergies with the network of Europe Direct centres in the Member States for the organisation of local events;
59. Notes that the Committee continued to implement three communication campaigns in 2022 in line with the political priorities for the 2020-2025 mandate on Bringing Europe closer to people, Building resilient regional and local communities, and Promoting cohesion as a fundamental value of the Union; welcomes the Committee’s efforts to extend its audience through digital communication and media outreach, with 18 890 media mentions in 2022, i.e. an increase of 20 % between 2020 and 2022;
60. Notes that, at the end of 2022, the Committee had 175 000 followers on its social media channels, i.e. 16 % more than in 2021, of which 54 800 followers (an increase of 8 %) on X (formerly Twitter), 58 100 (an increase of 6 %) on Facebook, 52 100 (an increase of 33 %) on LinkedIn and 10 500 (an increase of 67 %) on Instagram;
61. Notes that the Committee contributes to the open data portal of the Commission with datasets on members’ data and opinion data but also uses and promotes open data among local and regional authorities, thus endorsing greater transparency in its operations through freely accessible data in human and machine-readable formats and strengthening its link with citizens.

**ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS
FROM WHOM THE RAPPORTEUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT**

Pursuant to Article 8 of Annex I to the Rules of Procedure, the rapporteur declares that he has received input from the following entities or persons in the preparation of the report, until the adoption thereof in committee:

Entity and/or person
Secretary General of the Committee of the Regions
Head of Unit, Annual Budget and Finance, Directorate for Human Resources and Finance
Deputy Director, Directorate for Human Resources and Finance
Head of Unit "Infrastructure" in the EESC-CoR Joint Services
Deputy Head of Cabinet of the Secretary General

The list above is drawn up under the exclusive responsibility of the rapporteur.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

Date adopted	22.2.2024
Result of final vote	+: 21 -: 2 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Gilles Boyer, Olivier Chastel, Caterina Chinnici, Carlos Coelho, Beatrice Covassi, Luke Ming Flanagan, Daniel Freund, Isabel García Muñoz, Monika Hohlmeier, Joachim Kuhs, Petri Sarvamaa, Eleni Stavrou, Angelika Winzig, Lara Wolters
Substitutes present for the final vote	Corina Crețu, Jozef Mihál, Andrey Novakov, Mikuláš Peksa, Sabrina Pignedoli, Michal Wiezik
Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote	Marie Dauchy, Ljudmila Novak, Mick Wallace

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

21	+
NI	Sabrina Pignedoli
PPE	Caterina Chinnici, Carlos Coelho, Monika Hohlmeier, Ljudmila Novak, Andrey Novakov, Petri Sarvamaa, Eleni Stavrou, Angelika Winzig
Renew	Gilles Boyer, Olivier Chastel, Jozef Mihál, Michal Wiezik
S&D	Beatrice Covassi, Corina Crețu, Isabel García Muñoz, Lara Wolters
The Left	Luke Ming Flanagan, Mick Wallace
Verts/ALE	Daniel Freund, Mikuláš Peksa

2	-
ID	Marie Dauchy, Joachim Kuhs

0	0

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention