



TEXTS ADOPTED

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Discharge 2015: EU general budget - European Economic and Social Committee

1. European Parliament decision of 27 April 2017 on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2015, Section VI – European Economic and Social Committee (2016/2156(DEC))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2015¹,
- having regard to the consolidated annual accounts of the European Union for the financial year 2015 (COM(2016)0475 – C8-0274/2016)²,
- having regard to the Court of Auditors' annual report on the implementation of the budget concerning the financial year 2015, 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 2015, pursuant to Article 287 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to Article 314(10) and Articles 317, 318 and 319 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and repealing Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002⁵, and in particular Articles 55, 99, 164, 165 and 166 thereof,
- having regard to Rule 94 of and Annex IV to its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A8-0144/2017),

¹ OJ L 69, 13.3.2015.

² OJ C 380, 14.10.2016, p. 1.

³ OJ C 375, 13.10.2016, p. 1.

⁴ OJ C 380, 14.10.2016, p. 147.

⁵ OJ L 298, 26.10.2012, p. 1.

1. Grants the Secretary-General of the European Economic and Social Committee discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European Economic and Social Committee for the financial year 2015;
2. Sets out its observations in the resolution below;
3. Instructs its President to forward this decision and the resolution forming an integral part of it to the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Council, the Council, the Commission, the Court of Justice of the European Union, the Court of Auditors, the Committee of the Regions, the European Ombudsman, the European Data Protection Supervisor and the European External Action Service, and to arrange for their publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union (L series)*.

2. European Parliament resolution of 27 April 2017 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 2015, Section VI – European Economic and Social Committee (2016/2156(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 2015, Section VI – European Economic and Social Committee,
 - having regard to Rule 94 of and Annex IV to its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A8-0144/2017),
- A. whereas in the context of the discharge procedure, the discharge authority stresses the particular importance of further strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the Union institutions by improving transparency and accountability, implementing the concept of performance-based budgeting and good governance of human resources;
1. Welcomes the conclusion of the Court of Auditors (the “Court”), according to which the payments as a whole for the year ended on 31 December 2015 for administrative and other expenditure of the European Economic and Social Committee (the “Committee”) were free from material error;
 2. Notes with satisfaction that, in its annual report for 2015, the Court identified no significant weaknesses in respect of the audited topics relating to human resources and procurement for the Committee;
 3. Notes that in 2015 the Committee’s budget amounted to EUR 129 100 000 (compared to EUR 128 559 380 in 2014), with a utilisation rate of 95,9 %; points out that there was a slight increase of the utilisation rate in 2015, when compared to 2014;
 4. Notes that the Committee’s budget is mostly administrative, with a large amount being used for expenditure concerning persons working within the institution and the remaining amount relating to buildings, furniture, equipment and miscellaneous running costs; stresses, however, that introducing performance-based budgeting should not apply only to the Committee’s budget as a whole but should also include the setting of specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-based (SMART) targets to individual departments, units and the annual plans of members of staff; in this respect, calls on the Committee to introduce the principle of performance-based budgeting more widely in its daily operations;
 5. Notes the Committee’s follow-up observations to Parliament’s 2014 discharge resolution, attached to its annual activity report; welcomes the setting up of a support service for public procurement in 2015;
 6. Notes that 2015 was the starting year of a new term in office of the Committee, which may have affected the achievements, particularly of the legislative directorates, including interpretation and the communication and human resources directorates;

7. Notes that the report on the implementation of the Cooperation Agreement between Parliament and the Committee (the “Agreement”) assesses the cooperation between both institutions in a timely and positive manner;
8. Notes that, according to the Committee, the nature of the ‘intensified’ cooperation referred to in the Agreement needs to be better clarified and that some elements remain to be fully implemented and require sustained engagement from both institutions; is convinced that further efforts for full implementation of the Agreement and the development of synergies will bring positive results to both parties;
9. Reiterates its request for a joint assessment of the budgetary savings resulting from the Agreement to be included in its mid-term review or in the next follow-up report of the Agreement;
10. Notes that the opinions of the Committee are not well integrated into Parliament's work and calls on the Committee to develop proposals together with Parliament’s Secretary-General to streamline the procedures of the Committee and Parliament in this respect;
11. Notes the conclusion of a new administrative bilateral cooperation agreement between the Committee and the Committee of the Regions, signed in 2015; trusts that that agreement ensures further efficiency in the performance of both committees; takes the view that similar administrative functions should be merged in order to avoid a pointless duplication of activities;
12. Notes that the direct access between the RMD and the REM buildings was closed by Parliament due to security concerns after the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks; trusts that Parliament will re-assess the security concerns, as reopening of the passage would be beneficial to the three institutions;
13. Welcomes the administrative changes applied in 2015, in particular the full implementation of a cost-based system for reimbursement of members’ travel expenses and the full revamp of the members’ portal; calls on the Committee to provide a comparative annual overview of members’ travel expenses for 2014, 2015 and 2016;
14. Notes that, according to the Committee’s rules of procedure, its members are completely independent in the performance of their duties, in the general interest of the Union; notes that the declarations of interests of the members are available on the Committee’s website; calls on the Committee to join the future InterInstitutional Agreement on a Mandatory Transparency Register;
15. Is concerned about the high number of vacant permanent posts in 2015 and encourages the Committee to implement the necessary measures to improve its recruitment procedures;
16. Notes with concern the continued gender imbalance in senior and middle management posts (30 % / 70 % in the case of senior management); regrets also the geographic imbalance in senior and middle management posts, in particular the shortage of staff from Member States which acceded to the Union in 2004 or thereafter; calls on the Committee to take action to correct those imbalances and to report back to the discharge authority on the measures taken and on the results achieved;

17. Notes the Committee's plan to comply with the interinstitutional agreement¹ to reduce staff by 5 % over a period of five years; asks to be informed as to how this reduction tallies with the situation in 2016, in which three new posts were created; suggests that the Committee report back to Parliament on any alternative savings achieved to compensate the possible delay in the reduction of staff;
18. Welcomes the fact that the internal whistleblowing rules entered into force in early 2016;
19. Fully supports the creation of ethics counsellors' posts to help with possible harassment-related situations and specific training for the hierarchy to improve the knowledge and management of whistleblowing cases; regrets that three cases linked to harassment had to go through legal action;
20. Is unable to opine on the level of the staff absenteeism due to sick-leave because of the poor report provided by the Committee on that matter; calls on the Committee to report on its staff's sick leave divided by the number of working days on sick leave per individual member of staff;
21. Notes that the Committee decreased the average cost of its 'away days' by 35 % per participant compared with 2014 and that only 218 staff took part in the event, compared to 415 in 2014; calls on the Committee to target its well-being activities to include as many members of staff as possible to help further improve its staff's well-being;
22. Notes with satisfaction the downward trend of the unused rate of interpretation services requested from 4,3 % in 2014 to 3,5 % in 2015;
23. Welcomes the provision of translation data according to the harmonised methodology settled by the inter-institutional committee for translation and interpretation; notes the ongoing revision of the Code of Conduct for Translation, to be made jointly with the Committee of the Regions;
24. Notes that the outsourcing rate for translation increased to nearly 10 % in 2015 due to the transfer of staff to Parliament under the Agreement; calls on the Committee for an assessment of the cost-effectiveness of the arrangement now in practice;
25. Welcomes the Committee's strategic framework for learning and development, in particular the new focus on learning from colleague to colleague; asks the Committee to provide a follow up of that particular method in its next annual activity report;
26. Notes with great satisfaction the efforts and the results so far achieved in improving the environmental footprint of the Committee and the renewal of the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) certification;
27. Notes the administrative arrangements between the Committee and the European Anti-Fraud Office with a view to establishing a structured framework for cooperation and facilitating the rapid exchange of information;

¹ Interinstitutional Agreement of 2 December 2013 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on budgetary discipline, on cooperation in budgetary matters and on sound financial management (OJ C 373, 20.12.2013, p. 1).

28. Welcomes the information on the Committee's building policy in its annual activity report, especially given that it is important that the costs of such policy are properly rationalised and are not excessive;
29. Notes the Committee's efforts and achievements in stepping up its information and communication policy; stresses, however, that it is more important that the effectiveness of its opinions on Union decision-making be improved than that they be publicised generally.