













Procedure file

Basic information		
DEC - Discharge procedure	2021/2115(DEC)	Procedure completed
2020 discharge: General budget of the EU - European External Action Service		
Subject 8.70.03.10 2020 discharge		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	 Budgetary Control	 GARCÍA MUÑOZ Isabel	12/07/2021
		Shadow rapporteur	
		 LENAERS Jeroen	
		 MITUA Alin	
		 PEKSA Mikuláš	
	 KUHNS Joachim		
	 FLANAGAN Luke Ming		
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	 Foreign Affairs	 GAHLER Michael	14/07/2021
	 Development	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
	 Constitutional Affairs	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
European Commission	Commission DG Budget	Commissioner HAHN Johannes	

Key events			
30/06/2021	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2021)0381	Summary
14/09/2021	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
28/02/2022	Vote in committee		
28/03/2022	Committee report tabled for plenary	A9-0065/2022	
04/05/2022	Debate in Parliament		

04/05/2022	Decision by Parliament	T9-0153/2022	Summary
05/10/2022	Final act published in Official Journal		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2021/2115(DEC)
Procedure type	DEC - Discharge procedure
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	CONT/9/06629

Documentation gateway					
Non-legislative basic document		COM(2021)0381	30/06/2021	EC	Summary
Court of Auditors: opinion, report		N9-0043/2022 OJ C 430 25.10.2021, p. 0007	25/10/2021	CofA	
Committee draft report		PE699.078	17/12/2021	EP	
Committee opinion	AFET	PE699.319	25/01/2022	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE703.193	01/02/2022	EP	
Supplementary non-legislative basic document		06001/2022	03/03/2022	CSL	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A9-0065/2022	28/03/2022	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T9-0153/2022	04/05/2022	EP	Summary

Final act
Budget 2022/1711 OJ L 258 05.10.2022, p. 0151

2020 discharge: General budget of the EU - European External Action Service

PURPOSE: presentation by the Commission of the consolidated annual accounts of the European Union for the financial year 2020, as part of the 2020 discharge procedure.

Analysis of the accounts of the EU Institutions: European External Action Service

The consolidated annual accounts of the EU provide financial information on the activities of the institutions, agencies and other bodies of the EU from an accrual accounting and budgetary perspective. They are prepared according to the highest available international public sector standards.

The discharge is a Parliament decision that reflects its conclusions at the end of a process, the discharge procedure, on the way the Commission (and other institutions and bodies) has carried out its task of implementing the EU budget.

The decision is based in particular on the European Court of Auditors reports, in particular its annual report, in which the Court provides a Statement of Assurance (DAS) on the legality and regularity of transactions (payments and commitments).

Implementation of the EEASs appropriations for the financial year 2020

The initial budget for 2020 approved by Budget Authority was EUR 731.1 million, representing an increase of 5.2% compared to 2019. This amount was divided between:

- budget headquarters: EUR 276.3 million: 62.3% of this budget (EUR 172.1 million) was allocated to the payment of salaries and other entitlements of statutory and external staff. Other significant costs in the budget relate to buildings and associated costs (15% or EUR 42.2 million) and computer systems (including classified information systems), equipment and furniture with 18% or EUR 48.5 million;

- budget delegations: EUR 454.7 million: this amount was divided between EUR 132.3 million (29.1%) for remuneration and entitlements of statutory staff, EUR 79.4 million (17.5%) for external staff and outside services, EUR 33.9 million (7.5%) for other expenditure related to staff, EUR 162.6 million (35.7%) for buildings and associated costs and EUR 46.5 million (10.2%) for other administrative expenditure.

In addition to the EEASs own budget, the EEAS also disposed of an amount of EUR 212.4 million (including assigned revenues and carried over amounts) of Commission money to cover the administrative costs of Commission staff working in EU Delegations.

The EEASs activities in 2020 were marked by:

- the continuation of a challenging security environment affecting several areas of the work under civil unrest and political turmoil due to intensified conflicts or election processes;
- the COVID-19 pandemic which led to a special situation for the entire Institution and impacted heavily the operations of the HQ and EU Delegations. The EEAS implemented the Joint Communication on the Global EU response to COVID-19 and the Team Europe package with Member States. It contributed to addressing the urgent needs arising from the crisis through an emergency humanitarian response, support to the strengthening of health systems and research capacities, as well as to address the socio-economic consequences. By mobilising all existing cooperation programmes and redirecting existing financial resources, Team Europe has mobilised over EUR 38 billion in support to partner countries with over 50% of the funds disbursed in 2020. A particular focus was put on the most vulnerable partner countries and fragile populations, especially in the Neighbourhood, Africa and the Western Balkans, but also in the Middle East, parts of Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean;
- the EEAS contributing to the efforts at multilateral level. The EU used its convening power to secure funding and commitment across the world for universal access to prevention, diagnostic and treatment against COVID-19, including through the Coronavirus Global Response Pledging Conference. It pledged EUR 1.4 billion to this COVID-19 response pillar in the form of grants and guarantees. Team Europe contributed EUR 850 million to COVAX, the global vaccine initiative;
- the HR/VP supported the repatriation of stranded EU citizens. Coordinated by the EEAS and EU Delegations, more than 625 000 European nationals were repatriated between January and May 2020;
- an unprecedented disruption to the 2020 budget execution caused by the pandemic;
- the EU Delegation to China organising the voluntary evacuation of non-essential expatriate staff and / or their family members;
- the EEAS withdrew evacuation decisions in Iraq, Haiti and Afghanistan after significant reinforcements of these Delegations security.

2020 discharge: General budget of the EU - European External Action Service

The European Parliament decided by 555 votes to 83, with 6 abstentions, to grant discharge to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) for the implementation of the budget of the European External Action Service (EEAS) for the financial year 2020.

Parliament found that the Court of Auditors did not identify any significant weaknesses in the EEAS during its audit of the areas of human resources and procurement. On the basis of its audit work, the Court concluded that the payments for the administrative expenditure of the institutions, including the EEAS, for the financial year 2020 were, taken as a whole, free from material error. No specific problems with the regularity of transactions were identified.

In its resolution, adopted by 545 votes to 84 with 12 abstentions, Parliament made the following observations.

Budgetary and financial management

The EEAS budget for 2020 was EUR 731 000 000 (an increase of 5.2% compared to the budget for 2019, which was EUR 694 800 000), broken down as follows: EUR 276 300 000 for headquarters and EUR 454 700 000 for the delegations. EUR 212 400 000 from the Commission to cover the administrative costs of its staff working in delegations.

Overall, in 2020, the EEAS committed EUR 934 400 000, or 90% of the available budget for the year. EUR 919 200 000, or 79% of the available payment appropriations. Overall, the final EEAS budget for 2020 recorded a commitment implementation rate of 95% and a payment implementation rate of 82.3%, compared to 99.94% and 87.9% respectively in 2019.

During 2020, due to the pandemic, the change in intensity of the EEAS activities resulted in transfers, notably from human resources and mission budget lines to IT budget lines, which were efficient and result-oriented.

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

Overall, the EEAS had 4 643 employees in 2020 (compared to 4 474 in 2019). Overall, a total of 2 286 staff worked at headquarters and 2 357 in delegations. Parliament highlighted the high occupancy rate of posts, particularly in delegations, and a slightly lower rate at headquarters.

In a volatile international environment, Parliament noted that the strengthening of the EEAS' role in dealing with new challenges such as disinformation should be accompanied by a corresponding increase in staffing. It supported the EEAS's call for sufficient human resources to ensure the effectiveness of the Union's action as a global actor.

Parliament welcomed the fact that at the end of 2020 the overall gender representation was almost balanced, with women representing 48.65% of the staff. It welcomed the fact that the upward trend in the proportion of women reaching senior management positions continued in 2020, with women accounting for 27.3% of senior managers and 33.2% of middle managers. It regretted that only 27.4% of the Head of Delegation posts in 2020 were held by women.

Concerned about the gender imbalance in applications for management positions, Members called on the EEAS to explore strategies to encourage and facilitate female applications for management positions. They encouraged the EEAS to better promote its career opportunities and vacancies to national diplomats, international studies professionals, academia and civil society.

Parliament reiterated its concern about the geographical representation of EEAS staff, in particular as regards the posts of heads of delegation and middle and senior management. Stressing the importance of ensuring a balanced representation of countries that joined the Union after 2004 or later (EU13), it called on the EEAS to make significant progress towards achieving a balanced representation of Member States.

Members welcomed the fact that in 2020 the EEAS launched its first ever mandatory training for managers on how to create a harassment-free working environment.

Ethical framework and transparency

Parliament welcomed the adoption of the EU's global human rights sanctions regime in December 2020 and the adoption of the new EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy for the period 2020-2024.

Members called on the EEAS to monitor the posts of former heads of delegation, in view of their politically sensitive role and functions in the host countries, and to continue monitoring the professional activity of former senior officials until the end of the mandatory cooling-off period. They called on the EEAS to automatically request information on the intended occupation of senior members of staff leaving their positions.

Parliament believed that the highest ethical standards should be applied to avoid possible conflicts of interest, in particular with regard to heads of delegation. It encouraged the EEAS to join the transparency register, based on a service level agreement, in order to improve transparency by making public all meetings with all lobby groups that try to influence the policy implementation processes of the EU institutions.

Buildings and security

Acknowledging the complexity of managing EEAS buildings, Parliament noted that the office development projects carried out by the EEAS in 2020 have introduced mostly collaborative spaces while respecting the social distancing guidelines introduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The EEAS manages 178 office buildings in the delegations, representing a total surface area of 275 000 m². The annual cost of the rented properties for the delegations amounts to EUR 61 800 000. At the end of 2020, the EEAS managed 148 residences for Heads of Delegation, with a total surface area of 84 000 m². Parliament supported the EEAS in its efforts to increase the use of co-location in its delegations, which has more than quadrupled in the last five years and represents 7% of the total office space.

Parliament pointed out that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU institutions saw a 600% increase in cyber attacks. It supported the EEAS in strengthening its security measures protecting both staff members and its digital infrastructure from external threats and attacks. The EEAS has allocated a total budget of EUR 65 600 000 for security services for 2020.

COVID-19 pandemic

Parliament underlined that the EEAS has been able to ensure the continuity of its activities and the sound financial management of its operations without having experienced any significant problems during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Members commended the EEAS for the crucial role it played in the major emergency action to repatriate more than 600 000 stranded EU citizens worldwide, while contributing to the implementation of the large-scale humanitarian and assistance operation Team Europe, which mobilised more than EUR 38 billion in support to partner countries and contributed EUR 850 million to COVAX, the global vaccine distribution initiative.