

Press release – EU spending for 2015 approved

The Commission managed the 2015 EU budget funds according to the rules, so MEPs granted it a “discharge” approval for that year, in a resolution voted on Thursday.

Parliament’s management of its own budget in 2015 was approved as well. By contrast, Parliament postponed approving spending by the Council of Ministers and the European Council.

Error rate down...

The payments error rate fell from 4.4% in 2014 to 3.8% in 2015, which remains above the 2% threshold beneath which the European Court of Auditors could classify payments as “error-free”, MEPs note.

...but a new payment crisis looms

Parliament deplores substantial backlogs in the use of 2007-2013 European structural and investment (ESI) funds. By the end of 2015, payment of 10% of the €446.2 billion allocated was still outstanding, MEPs note. They stress that “this situation may indeed pose a significant challenge and undermine the effectiveness of ESI Funds” in a number of member states.

The ongoing payments backlog, as well as global economic recession, could mean that “delays in budget execution for the 2014-2020 programming period will be greater than those experienced for the 2007-2013”, MEPs regret.

Climate spending shortfall and budget fragmentation

MEPs deplore the fact that climate-related spending accounted for only 17.3% in 2015, even though the objective was to reach at least, 20% over the financial period – a target which may not be met any more without more effort to tackle climate change.

Parliament also criticizes the fragmentation of the EU budget, which is implemented through “different tools and combinations between them as for example programmes, structural and investment funds, trust funds, strategic investment fund, guarantee funds, facilities, financial instruments, macro-financial assistance instruments”. These “various shadow budgets” undermine the credibility of the EU budget, warn MEPs, who demand that funding arrangements be made “clearer, simpler, more coherent.”

Council discharge postponed

For the seventh consecutive year, the Budgetary Control Committee had recommended that Parliament postpone granting discharge to the [Council of Ministers](#) and the [European Council](#) (heads of state or government) due to their failure to cooperate with Parliament by supplying the figures it needs

to assess spending.

Background

The EU Commission is legally responsible for the biggest chunk of the funds, amounting to €145.2 billion in 2015, but around 80% of all EU funding is in fact managed locally, by EU member states.

The EU budget is always balanced, which means no single euro is spent on debt.

The decision on whether to grant discharge for the execution of the EU budget is made by the European Parliament, acting on a non-binding recommendation by the [Council](#), the other arm of the EU budgetary authority. Another key institution is the [European Court of Auditors](#), the EU's independent external auditor, whose reports are a fundamental part of the procedure. The discharge procedure has proved to be a powerful tool, which has had an impact on the evolution of the EU's budgetary system, while helping to increase Parliament's political leverage.

Press release – EU's farthest-flung fisheries need funding, say MEPs

Young fishermen and fish farmers in the EU's outermost regions (ORs) need financial help and incentives, including money for new boats, said Parliament on Thursday.

The non-legislative resolution was passed by 428 votes to 64, with 118 abstentions. An amendment to allow EU and national funding to renew the OR fleet was passed by 358 votes to 240, with 16 abstentions.

Commenting on the resolution and the amendment, rapporteur Ulrike Rodust (S&D, DE) said "I have tried to work out the best proposals for a possible solution. And I deplore the fact that the amendment has raised hopes which in my opinion cannot be fulfilled. This result does not correspond to the coherence of the Common Fisheries Policy and the European Maritime Fisheries Fund, respectively, and I doubt that it will pass legal scrutiny. Emphasis should be put on the aim of the Common Fisheries Policy to reach sustainable stocks and fisheries".

EU and national funding to renew fleet

The renewal funding amendment calls on the Commission to “allow the funding (at EU or national level) of the ORs’ artisanal and traditional fishing vessels which land all their catches in ports in the ORs and contribute to local sustainable development, so as to increase human safety, comply with European hygiene standards, fight illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and achieve greater environmental efficiency”.

MEPs nonetheless stipulated that “this fishing fleet renewal must remain within the limits of authorised capacity ceilings, must be restricted to the replacement of an old vessel by a new one, and must allow sustainable fishing and reaching the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) objective”.

New financial instrument for OR fisheries

MEPs ask the EU Commission “to look into the possibility of establishing, as soon as possible, an instrument specifically dedicated to supporting fisheries in the outermost regions, along the lines of the POSEI scheme for agriculture”.

Programmes of Options Specifically Relating to Remoteness and Insularity (POSEI), governed by [POSEI Regulation No 228/2013](#), include specific measures for agriculture in the outermost regions, such as production and import subsidies.

Aquaculture and young fishermen

MEPs stress that the potential of aquaculture should be better exploited in the ORs, as it might result in new production possibilities and high-quality products, with strong support from the EU. They call on the Commission to encourage and support aquaculture development projects.

Better incentives should be created under a future European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to encourage young people to work in the maritime economy, particularly by means of vocational training and promoting measures which improve the incomes and job security, and improve overall sustainable organisation of the maritime economy in the ORs, says the text.

Background

The EU’s nine “outermost regions” include are parts of France (Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Réunion, Martinique, Mayotte and Saint-Martin), Portugal (Madeira and Azores) and Spain (Canary Islands). [Article 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#) sets out their defining features, which include remoteness, insularity, small size, difficult topography and climate, and economic dependence on a few products.

Procedure: non-legislative resolution

Press release – Court of Auditors: Parliament endorses Ildikó Gáll-Pelcz as member for Hungary

The appointment of European Parliament Vice-President Ildikó Gáll-Pelcz as a member of the European Court of Auditors (ECA) was endorsed in plenary on Thursday by 326 votes to 126, with 193 abstentions.

As a candidate ECA member, Ms [Gáll-Pelcz](#) (EPP, HU) was given a hearing in the Budgetary Control Committee on 12 April. Her appointment still needs to be confirmed by the Council of the EU.

Ms Gáll-Pelcz, who has university degrees in economics and engineering, was a Member of the Hungarian National Assembly from 2006-10. From 2009 she also served as its Deputy Speaker. She became an MEP in June 2010 and was elected Vice-President of the European Parliament in July 2014 and again in January 2017.

Ms Gáll-Pelcz will take up her new duties in the Luxembourg-based court once her appointment is approved by the Council.

Background

The Court of Auditors has 28 members, one from each member state. They are appointed for a renewable term of six years. The Council, after consulting the European Parliament, decides on the candidate presented by each country.

To prepare for a hearing in Parliament, a candidate is asked to answer a questionnaire prepared by the Budgetary Control Committee. At the hearing, candidates may make a five-minute opening statement, followed by a question and answer session with committee members. The committee votes on the candidate in a secret ballot. If approved in committee, the nomination is then put to a vote by Parliament as a whole.

Procedure: 2017/0802(NLE)

Déclaration conjointe de la Haute-Représentante/Vice-Présidente Federica Mogherini et du Commissaire pour la Politique

Nous tenons à féliciter chaleureusement le Premier ministre du Royaume du Maroc M. Saad Eddine El Othmani suite à la formation du nouveau gouvernement qui a obtenu la confiance de la Chambre des Représentants en faveur de son programme.

Le Maroc constitue depuis longtemps un partenaire stratégique dans notre voisinage, avec lequel nous avons développé une relation de confiance de longue date.

La coopération entre le Maroc et l'UE est solide et touche de nombreux domaines stratégiques, ce qui rend notre relation mutuellement bénéfique.

L'Union européenne réitère son soutien pour la poursuite et l'approfondissement du mouvement de réforme dans lequel le Maroc s'est engagé, dans le sillage des réformes constitutionnelles de 2011 entreprises sous l'autorité du roi Mohammed VI.

La formation du gouvernement a lieu à un moment clé de notre relation, et nous saisissons cette occasion pour confirmer la détermination de l'Union européenne à travailler de concert avec le nouveau gouvernement marocain sur le renforcement de l'excellent partenariat entre l'Union européenne et le Maroc afin de faire face aux défis communs.

Remarks by Federica Mogherini upon arrival at the informal meeting of the EU Ministers of Defence

Check against delivery!

Good morning, today we will have a quite intense meeting with the Defence Ministers also welcoming the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation] Secretary General [Jens Stoltenberg] and the Head of the UN [United Nations] Peacekeeping Operations [Jean-Pierre Lacroix] – strong partners with whom we

work very intensively.

We will have a session on Libya and our work in and around Libya at sea. Yesterday, we were visiting the flagship of Operation Sophia to fight the smugglers' networks but also to train the Libyan coastguards. Inside Libya, we have work ongoing to strengthen the capacity of the authorities of Libya, especially on the control of the territory and the reforms they have to make. Also the work we are doing south of Libya with our partners in the Sahel because we know very well that be it on migration, be it on security, counterterrorism or the smuggling of arms, there is work to be done at the southern border with the desert. And this is the work we are doing especially with Niger, with Chad, with Mali.

So, we will discuss with the Ministers this approach in different manners and then we will move to another very important point which is the continuation of the work we are doing to strengthen European defence and security. As you know, this is a work we have launched last year already with the Global Strategy [the EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy] and then, in the last eight, nine months, we have moved quite fast and quite far on strengthening the European defence.

Today we will discuss with Ministers in an informal manner, so do not expect decisions to be taken, it is not the setting for that, but we will discuss how to move forward on Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), on the use of Battlegroups, on the fund that the [European] Commission is preparing to support the European defence, both on capabilities and on research and industry. So it will be, I believe, not only stocktaking but also a strong push to develop this European defence chapter about cooperation and integration that was indicated also in Rome when we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Treaties as one of the main fields where the European Union will move on in the next years.

Q. You said yesterday that the EU was ready to provide ships to the Libyan coastguards. When could this start and what form could it take? Which countries will contribute?

Too early to say that. We are assessing the needs. We have for the moment, as I said yesterday, trained around 100 Libyan coast guards and navy. We are now assessing together with the Libyan authorities the needs and this is a process that will take place in the next months. And I know that some countries bilaterally – for example Italy – are just now starting to provide or considering to provide some vessels for patrolling the Libyan territorial waters. But this will be a European common effort.

Q. How much progress can you make on EU defence when France is still choosing a President?

Well, that is a process that will be concluded in a couple of weeks from now. So I do not see any problem with the political calendar on that. We have moved very consistently and very fast and united on this file. I would just mention the fact that in March we took important decisions on military capabilities to be together conducted and run in Brussels – and people were

sceptical about the possibility of us moving still at 28, and still we have done it.

So, I am very confident that the chapter of the European defence will continue to move forward, in a very concrete, constructive and united manner – no matter about the political calendar that obviously is important in France as in all other EU Member States. I see this as a clear priority for all. And by the way, if you ask not only the governments but if you ask the European citizens, the European citizens clearly indicate the field of foreign policy, security and defence as the field where the European Union added value is absolutely not in discussion. They want to see more European Union in the field of foreign policy, security and defence – and this is what we are doing.

Q. Is it possible to equip the Libyan coast guards with weapons?

We are talking about non-military equipment.

Q. Is there still a possibility that Operation Sophia goes into the territorial waters of Libya?

This would require an invitation from the Libyan authorities and a UN Security Council resolution. What we have achieved in international waters would now be useful to achieve in Libyan territorial waters, both in terms of dismantling the traffickers' network but also in terms of saving lives. You know that most of the tragedies now take place close to the Libyan coast. What we are currently doing is trying to empower the Libyans to do this work in Libyan territorial waters. This would allow us to solve the problem of smugglers and save lives without necessarily entering ourselves in the Libyan waters. Our objective is not in itself being in the territorial waters of Libya, our objective is that in the territorial waters of Libya the work is done. If it is done by the Libyans, it is even better.

Q. But is this partner reliable enough?

It is the partner with whom we are working. It is the Government of National Accord that is internationally recognised and we are trying to do all we can to strengthen their capacity. We are also working with municipalities and with others in the country. For us what is important is this: that there is the legitimacy from the international perspective and, on the other side, that there is the political work in Libya. This is maybe less for the Defence Ministers to discuss but it is very much for us to do. I will debrief the Ministers also of the fact that we are intensifying our work, especially with the Arab League and the African Union and the UN to push for a political inclusive process in Libya that allows, that would allow the east and the west and the south to come together and Libyans themselves to find a way to avoid fighting each other and uniting together to fight terrorism. This is the effort that on the political side we are committed to do and we will continue to discuss this.