

2018 discharge – EESC reiterates its commitment to fighting harassment and misconduct in the workplace



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) takes careful note of the European Parliament's vote not to grant the 2018 budget discharge and, whilst regretting the situation that led to this refusal, reiterates its firm commitment to fighting harassment and misconduct in the workplace.

The EESC attaches great importance to the discharge procedure and is taking this strong signal from the European Parliament very seriously. The EESC is aware that the discharge has been refused for reasons that are not directly linked to the implementation of its 2018 budget. Indeed, the EESC is pleased to see that the EP welcomes its overall prudent and sound financial management as well as the good collaboration between the two institutions.

The Committee regrets the findings of the OLAF investigation, with which it fully cooperated. The OLAF report in this respect was very clear and its recommendations have been accepted in their entirety by the EESC bureau in a specific decision on 9 June 2020.

The Committee continues to work on a zero-tolerance policy towards any behaviour that is likely to undermine human dignity, and is strongly committed to remedying any shortcomings that may still exist in the current system. The EESC is aware of the suffering and distress experienced by the victims and is therefore keen to continue offering them all possible support (both in terms of legal assistance and in the workplace) in full confidentiality, as provided for by the rules.

In addition, the EESC has initiated a revision package concerning the decisions on harassment, whistleblowing and disciplinary procedures in order to improve the robustness of the legal and administrative tools where necessary, to increase synergies between these instruments and to reinforce the Committee's ethics and integrity framework. The new political leadership of the EESC is fully committed to this process and will devote all the time and resources necessary to ensuring that the incidents of the past cannot take place again.

The next steps will be the revision of the Members' Code of Conduct, with a view to establishing harsher sanctions in the event of any breaches. This is a top priority of the EESC's new political leadership and will be actively reported on to all stakeholders involved.

Press release – Member states must stop selling EU passports immediately, MEPs demand



In a plenary debate with Justice Commissioner Didier Reynders, MEPs stressed the inherent risks that these programmes give rise to, namely money laundering, tax evasion and corruption. They insisted that Europe must not have “a fast-track entrance for criminals”.

MEPs underlined that granting EU citizenship to third-country nationals without proper checks and transparency has negative consequences in other member states, eroding mutual trust and undermining common values.

Several speakers referred to the recent scandal in Cyprus, where high-ranking officials – including the Speaker of the national parliament – were secretly recorded offering to assist a fictional Chinese executive with a criminal record in getting a Cypriot passport through the national “citizenship by investment” scheme. They also acknowledge the Commission’s decision to [open infringement procedures against Cyprus and Malta](#), though some complained that it has taken too long to act.

Some MEPs noted that the share of revenues from these programmes is significant for countries such as Cyprus, whilst many argued that EU values and rights should not be for sale.

Background

Cyprus, Malta, and Bulgaria are the three EU countries where it is possible to get citizenship in exchange for an investment, the so-called “golden passports”. As many as 19 EU countries operate “residence by investment” programmes, known as “golden visas”.

In January 2019, the European Commission established [a group of experts](#) with representatives from all EU member states to develop common standards and guidelines in this area. After four meetings last year, the group has so far not met in 2020.

[Press release – The 2020 Sakharov Prize awarded to the democratic opposition in Belarus](#)



European Parliament President [David Sassoli](#) announced the laureates in the Brussels plenary chamber at noon on Thursday, following an earlier decision by the Conference of Presidents (President and political group leaders).

“Let me congratulate the representatives of the Belarusian opposition for their courage, resilience and determination. They have stood and still stay strong in the face of a much stronger adversary. But they have on their side something that brute force can never defeat – and this is the truth. So my message for you, dear laureates, is to stay strong and not to give up on your fight. Know that we are by your side”, President Sassoli said, following the decision.

"I would also like to add a word on the recent killing of one of this year's finalists, Mr Arnold Joaquín Morazán Erazo, part of the Guapinol environmental group. The group is opposing an iron oxide mine in Honduras. It is imperative that a credible, independent and immediate investigation is launched into this case and those responsible must be held to account", he added.

Protesting against a brutal regime

The democratic opposition in Belarus is represented by the Coordination Council, an initiative of brave women, as well as prominent political and civil society figures. Read more about the laureates, as well as the other finalists [here](#).

Belarus has been in the midst of a political crisis since the disputed presidential elections on 9 August, which led to an uprising against authoritarian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka and a subsequent brutal crackdown on demonstrators by the regime.

The Sakharov award ceremony will be held on 16 December.

On Wednesday, Parliament also adopted new recommendations calling for a comprehensive review of the EU's relations with Belarus. Read more [here](#).

Background

The [Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought](#) is awarded each year by the European Parliament. It was set up in 1988 to honour individuals and organisations defending human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is named in honour of Soviet physicist and political dissident Andrei Sakharov and the prize money is 50 000 euros.

Last year, the prize was given to [Ilham Tohti](#), an Uyghur economist fighting for the rights of China's Uyghur minority.

EU's Sustainable Finance Platform kicks off

It will advise the European Commission on criteria and standards related to what constitutes green investments. The Platform will work initially for two years. FRA is in particular contributing to a sub-group on social taxonomy, which will explore reinforcing social criteria. This includes taking the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights into consideration, as well as human rights conventions.

FRA Director discusses COVID-19 impact with Western Balkan Justice ministers

He gave a presentation on the state of play on the impact of COVID-19 on fundamental rights, including the functioning of courts and the rights of vulnerable people. The German Presidency of the Council of the EU invited FRA to take part in the discussions.