

[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 – 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)

[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

Liberal Democrats commit to ending rough sleeping in Britain

The Liberal Democrats have committed to ending the scandal of rough sleeping in Britain, as the Homelessness Reduction Bill enters into force today.

Following a campaign visit to the Hundred Houses Society, a charitable housing association in Cambridge, Tim Farron announced a series of measures the party would put in place to help end rough sleeping.

These include introducing a Housing First provider in each local authority, to put long-term homeless people straight into independent homes rather than emergency shelters. Other policies include increasing funding for local councils for homelessness prevention, reinstating housing benefit for under-21s and reversing planned cuts to Local Housing Allowance rates.

The number of people sleeping rough rose to 4,134 in 2016, up 16% on the previous year. The Government has estimated that homelessness costs the state up to £1 billion a year.

The news comes as a coalition of charities, including Centrepoin, Crisis, Homeless Link, Shelter and St Mungo's, have called on political parties to commit to end rough sleeping in Britain.

Liberal Democrat Leader Tim Farron said: "It is a national scandal that so many people are sleeping on the streets in 21st century Britain.

"By increasing support for homelessness prevention and properly funding emergency accommodation, we can end rough sleeping across the country.

"We will also ensure each local authority has at least one provider of Housing First services, to allow long-term homeless people to live independently in their own homes.

"The evidence suggests that supporting people and giving them long-term, stable places to stay is far more successful in tackling homelessness than constantly moving them to different temporary accommodation.

"Under this government, homelessness has soared and the stripping of young people of housing benefit threatens to make matters even worse.

"This election is a chance to change the direction of this country and stand up for a Britain that is open, tolerant and united."

Labour will stand up for the many by prioritising neighbourhood policing and bearing down on crime – Diane Abbott

Diane Abbott MP, Labour's Shadow Home Secretary, commenting on Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures showing an increase in crime over the last year, said:

"These figures are a stark reminder of Theresa May's record of failure on policing and crime.

"Almost every force in the country recorded an increase in crime over the last year, with worrying rises in some of the most violent offences, including gun and knife crime and homicide.

"There is a real choice at this election on policing and crime.

"Theresa May recklessly cut police budgets as Home Secretary, with the loss of over 20,000 officers, and plans to cut even further if re-elected.

"Labour will stand up for the many by prioritising neighbourhood policing and bearing down on crime."