



2023/2134(DEC)

31.1.2024

OPINION

of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

for the Committee on Budgetary Control

on 2022 discharge: General budget of the EU - European External Action
Service
(2023/2134(DEC))

Rapporteur for opinion: Katalin Cseh

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Foreign Affairs calls on the Committee on Budgetary Control, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Emphasises that the EU needs to continue developing a robust and resilient external service with clear political leadership in order to tackle the current challenges and ensure the coherence of the Union's foreign policy; in that respect notes the key role of the EEAS and especially of its Delegations in the context of the geopolitical impact of the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the resulting need to support partner countries around the world and strengthen global alliances; highlights the importance of continued strong political engagement and leverage at bilateral level, as well as in public and cultural diplomacy to promote the Union's values, principles and interests, and in strategic communications to combat disinformation; calls for more efficient use of available resources to be introduced to avoid putting the Union's effectiveness at risk on the international scene; sees the need for EU delegations to continue their coordinated efforts to increase the visibility of EU-funded projects in order for resources to be used to the fullest extent possible; calls on the EEAS to continue its efforts to modernise its approaches and invest in new skills and capabilities while increasing cost-efficiency; reiterates the importance of promoting the rule of law, the fundamental freedoms and the values that the EU is based on;
2. Is extremely concerned about the continued engagement of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán with the Russian President Vladimir Putin despite EU sanctions and an International Criminal Court arrest warrant for war crimes against the latter in light of the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine; stresses that, under Article 24 (3) TEU, Member States have the obligation to support the Union's external and security policy actively and unreservedly in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity, and shall refrain from actions contrary to the Union's interest; Reminds the HR/VP of his obligation to ensure Member States' compliance with the principles under this article, and invites him, against this backdrop, to report to Parliament on his consideration of the Hungarian Prime Minister's policy vis à vis Russia and compliance with this Treaty article, as well as any potential action he has undertaken;
3. Strongly condemns the use of sexual and gender-based violence as a weapon of war in Ukraine, classifying it as a war crime; highlights the growing reports of human trafficking, sexual violence, exploitation, rape, and abuse faced by women and children fleeing Ukraine to Europe; calls on EU countries to address the specific needs of women and girls in reception centers, ensuring immediate availability of gender-based violence services; urges the EU and host and transit countries to guarantee access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services; calls on the EU and its Member States to support organisations providing services and shelter to gender-based violence survivors among refugee women and girls;
4. Is deeply concerned by the budgetary constraints the EEAS is facing, which can have serious and far-reaching negative consequences for the EU's external action overall and the performance of the EU institutions in this area; acknowledges that the lack of action

to rectify the current budgetary situation of the EEAS can severely impact the EU's relations with third countries; strongly affirms the need to provide the EEAS with the required financial and staff resources both at its headquarters and in EU Delegations;

5. Recalls that the direct and indirect impacts of climate change undermine global peace and security while deepening existing vulnerabilities and inequalities and pose risks to human rights; urges the Commission and the EEAS to design and conduct robust EU climate diplomacy with the aim to foster international cooperation towards the goals of the Paris Agreement, strengthen the external dimension of the Green New Deal and provide tangible support for ambitious CO2 reduction targets in third countries;
6. Notes that in 2022 40% of the appointed Heads of Delegations were women; calls on the EEAS to lead by example, as set out in the Gender Action Plan III, and to continue to improve the representation of women and marginalised groups across all levels with the goal to establish gender parity in all leadership and management positions, gender-responsive leadership and gender-sensitive recruitment processes as soon as possible; regrets the slow pace at which the EEAS staff is moving towards balance as regards diversity, gender and geography imbalances and notes that all categories of staff should be included and calls on all Member States to nominate more women and candidates from marginalised groups to seconded positions in the EEAS; stresses that the GAP III dictates that by 2025 85% of new EU actions must contribute to gender equality and women and girls' empowerment, while EEAS must accelerate the progress towards the goals of GAP III by meaningfully focusing in its every day work on the GAP III's key areas of engagement, including ending gender-based violence, promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic and social rights and empowerment, equal participation and leadership;
7. Calls for robust gender training strategies within the EEAS, emphasising the need to invest in resources and expertise for developing training and education strategies that apply a gender equality approach to international policies in order to achieve genuine change of culture within the EEAS; calls for special attention to be given to integrate gender mainstreaming mechanisms, address gender budgeting, conduct gender impact assessments, and address gender-based violence; recommends the adoption of a comprehensive training program for the effective implementation of GAP III at all levels of the EEAS;
8. Expresses concern about the global status of LGBTIQ+ rights and the growing resistance to women's rights, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights in developing countries; calls on the Commission and the EEAS to address setbacks in recognizing and protecting these rights; emphasises the need to prioritise targeted support for civil society organisations (CSOs) and communities advocating for sexual and reproductive health and rights, women's rights, gender equality, the LGBTIQ+ community and other marginalised groups, including enhanced measures to decriminalise homosexuality; recalls that a minimum of 85% of new actions under the NDICI-GE instrument should prioritize gender equality, with at least 5% specifically dedicated to women's and girls' rights and empowerment;
9. Emphasises the imperative for complete implementation and systematic incorporation of gender mainstreaming and the EU Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) into every aspect

of EU external action, including trade and sustainable development policy, at all levels of engagement and across various activities and frameworks, including beyond the duration of GAP III;

10. Recognises the importance of the creation of the EEAS Crisis Response Centre (CRC); reiterates the importance of adequate levels of cybersecurity for assets, premises and activities, including for headquarters and the EU delegations and for any other EU asset or person in a third country; notes the significance of the culture of security and safety across all entities which need to be ensured through personnel, procedures, infrastructure, tools (including IT) and an adequate budget to ensure that all of them can perform their critical and essential functions in the event of unexpected or critical situations; acknowledges the EEAS's efforts to fight disinformation and foreign interference; welcomes that EEAS strengthened its international cooperation with Member States, Union institutions and NATO in this regard; is strongly of the opinion that the EEAS should not only highlight the disinformation coming from third countries but also reveal sources which are distributing the same or similar style of disinformation within the Union;
11. Stresses that, ahead of increasing geopolitical challenges and crisis worldwide, the EU needs to be able to rely on necessary first-hand information on global issues occurring outside its borders; calls, in this regard, for strengthening the EU INTCEN, the EEAS Crisis Response Center and the SatCen by enhancing its staff and financial resources, as well as its capabilities;
12. Calls for the Union to enhance its toolbox to counter foreign interference, propaganda and influence operations, including the reinforcement of the EEAS strategic communication task force; highlights the need to broaden its mandate in relation to state sponsored disinformation originating in China and the Middle East, particularly Iran and mitigating its effects on affected sides; reiterates its call on the EEAS to allow the task force to track the routes of foreign interference, to reveal sources that are distributing to the spread of disinformation in a similar fashion within the Union as well and providing it with further necessary financial and human resources;
13. Considers it essential for the EU to increase its investment in public and cultural diplomacy and communication efforts, particularly ahead of the active engagement of authoritarian and illiberal regimes; stresses, therefore, the need to allocate the necessary resources to the Strategic Communication and Foresight division of the EEAS;
14. Calls on the EU delegations in our neighbourhood and in the Western Balkan countries to increase their engagement in order to support a more active and effective communication policy on the European perspective and to be prepared to provide the best possible assistance to the countries engaged in pro-democratic and pro-European reforms; calls on the EU delegations to apply a more credible and merit-based approach based on the Copenhagen criteria, notably on the rule of law, democracy and the protection of human rights, especially given the limited progress made by some countries in the Western Balkans;
15. Calls on EU delegations to enhance support to genuine democratic actors and civil society in the Western Balkans as well as strongly and publicly denounce actions by

illiberal and undemocratic actors that go against the Union's interest and ensure the implementation of IPA III funding is in line with the EU's objectives;

16. Urges the EEAS to follow-up on their announcement provided in their written answers to the Committee on Budgetary Control in the context of the 2019 discharge, to adopt and put into practice its self-standing implementation provisions on outside activities and assignments, which create a sui generis legal basis for heads of delegations to better protect the European Union's image and reputation;
17. Calls for the establishment of a permanent structure and the necessary resources for the European Diplomatic Academy, which can contribute to fully developing an autonomous EU diplomacy with a common diplomatic based on an EU perspective; considers that in the future this Academy should include a system of selection, recruitment and training of Europeans who have completed higher education and are not diplomats of Member States; stresses the need to explore and decide on ways of access to the EEAS for those graduating from this Academy;
18. Urges the EEAS and the EU delegations to closely monitor the state of democracy in the different countries and to provide logistical and technological support to human rights defenders and indigenous persons, in particular women.

**ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS
FROM WHOM THE RAPPOREUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT**

The rapporteur declares under her exclusive responsibility that she did not receive input from any entity or person to be mentioned in this Annex pursuant to Article 8 of Annex I to the Rules of Procedure.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	23.1.2024
Result of final vote	+: 45 -: 10 0: 3
Members present for the final vote	Alexander Alexandrov Yordanov, Maria Arena, Petras Auštrevičius, Krzysztof Brejza, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Anna Fotyga, Michael Gahler, Giorgos Georgiou, Sunčana Glavak, Raphaël Glucksmann, Klemen Grošelj, Bernard Guetta, Márton Gyöngyösi, Dietmar Köster, Andrius Kubilius, Ilhan Kyuchyuk, Jean-Lin Lacapelle, Miriam Lexmann, Nathalie Loiseau, Leopoldo López Gil, Antonio López-Istúriz White, Thierry Mariani, David McAllister, Vangelis Meimarakis, Francisco José Millán Mon, Alessandra Moretti, Javier Nart, Matjaž Nemec, Demetris Papadakis, Kostas Papadakis, Tonino Picula, Thijs Reuten, Nacho Sánchez Amor, Mounir Satouri, Jordi Solé, Tineke Strik, Dominik Tarczyński, Hermann Tertsch, Viola von Cramon-Taubadel, Thomas Waitz, Isabel Wiseler-Lima, Tomáš Zdechovský, Bernhard Zimniok, Željana Zovko
Substitutes present for the final vote	Attila Ara-Kovács, Adam Bielan, Özlem Demirel, Christophe Grudler, Arba Kokalari, Georgios Kyrtos, Katrin Langensiepen, Karsten Lucke, Erik Marquardt, Juozas Olekas, Bert-Jan Ruissen, Christian Sagartz, Mick Wallace
Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote	Theresa Bielowski

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

45	+
ECR	Adam Bielan
NI	Márton Gyöngyösi
PPE	Alexander Alexandrov Yordanov, Krzysztof Brejza, Michael Gahler, Sunčana Glavak, Arba Kokalari, Andrius Kubilius, Leopoldo López Gil, Antonio López-Istúriz White, David McAllister, Vangelis Meimarakis, Francisco José Millán Mon, Christian Sagartz, Isabel Wiseler-Lima, Tomáš Zdechovský
Renew	Petras Auštrevičius, Klemen Grošelj, Christophe Grudler, Bernard Guetta, Georgios Kyrtos, Ilhan Kyuchyuk, Nathalie Loiseau, Javier Nart
S&D	Attila Ara-Kovács, Maria Arena, Theresa Bielowski, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Raphaël Glucksmann, Dietmar Köster, Karsten Lucke, Alessandra Moretti, Matjaž Nemeč, Juozas Olekas, Demetris Papadakis, Tonino Picula, Thijs Reuten, Nacho Sánchez Amor
Verts/ALE	Katrin Langensiepen, Erik Marquardt, Mounir Satouri, Jordi Solé, Tineke Strik, Viola von Cramon-Taubadel, Thomas Waitz

10	-
ECR	Hermann Tertsch
ID	Jean-Lin Lacapelle, Thierry Mariani, Bernhard Zimniok
NI	Kostas Papadakis
PPE	Miriam Lexmann, Željana Zovko
The Left	Özlem Demirel, Giorgos Georgiou, Mick Wallace

3	0
ECR	Anna Fotyga, Bert-Jan Ruissen, Dominik Tarczyński

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention