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DRAFT REPORT

on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2023, Section VII – Committee of the Regions
(2024/2026(DEC))

Committee on Budgetary Control

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1. PROPOSAL FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DECISION

on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2023, Section VII – Committee of the Regions (2024/2026(DEC))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2023¹,
- having regard to the consolidated annual accounts of the European Union for the financial year 2023 (COM(2024)272 – C10-0074/2024)²,
- having regard to the Committee of the Regions’ annual activity report for 2023 and its report on budgetary and financial management for the financial year 2023,
- having regard to the Court of Auditors’ annual report on the implementation of the budget concerning the financial year 2023, together with the institutions’ replies³,
- having regard to the statement of assurance⁴ as to the reliability of the accounts and the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions provided by the Court of Auditors for the financial year 2023, pursuant to Article 287 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to Article 314(10) and Articles 317, 318 and 319 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012⁵, and in particular Articles 59, 118, 260, 261 and 262 thereof,
- having regard to Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union⁶, and in particular Articles 59, 118, 266, 267 and 268 thereof,
- having regard to Rule 102 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,

¹ OJ L 58, 23.2.2023, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/budget/2023/1/oj>.

² OJ C, C/2024/5462, 10.10.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/5462/oj>.

³ OJ C, C/2024/5882, 9.10.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/5882/oj>.

⁴ OJ C, C/2024/6041, 10.10.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/6041/oj>.

⁵ OJ L 193, 30.7.2018, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2018/1046/oj>.

⁶ OJ L, 2024/2509, 26.9.2024, ELI: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/2509/oj>.

- having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A10-0000/2025),
- 1. Grants the Secretary-General of the Committee of the Regions discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Committee of the Regions for the financial year 2023 / Postpones its decision on granting the Secretary-General of the Committee of the Regions discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Committee of the Regions for the financial year 2023;
- 2. Sets out its observations in the resolution below;
- 3. Instructs its President to forward this decision and the resolution forming an integral part of it to the Committee of the Regions, the Council, the Commission and the Court of Auditors, and to arrange for their publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union* (L series).

2. MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2023, Section VII – Committee of the Regions (2024/2026(DEC))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2023, Section VII – Committee of the Regions,
 - having regard to Rule 102 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A10-0000/2025),
- A. whereas in the context of the discharge procedure, the discharge authority wishes to stress the particular importance of further strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the Union institutions by improving transparency and accountability, and implementing the concept of performance-based budgeting and good governance of human resources;
- B. whereas the Committee of the Regions (the ‘Committee’) is a political assembly of 329 members elected in the regions, cities, villages and municipalities of the 27 Member States of the Union, operating as a consultative body for the Union institutions, with the mission of contributing to the Union policy shaping and decision making process from the point of view of the local and regional authorities, and at the same time contributing to make the Union more effective and closer to the citizens;
- C. whereas the consultation of the Committee by the Commission or the Council is mandatory in certain cases, while the Committee may also adopt opinions on its own initiative and enjoys a wide area for referral, as set out in the Treaties, allowing it to be consulted by Parliament;
- D. whereas the Committee’s activities are defined on the basis of its overall political strategy as set out in its resolution of 2 July 2020 on its priorities for 2020-2025¹, and whereas the Committee adopted three political priorities for the 2020-2025 mandate, accompanied by three communication campaigns: Bringing Europe closer to people, Building resilient regional and local communities, and Promoting cohesion as a fundamental value of the EU;
- E. whereas the local and regional administrations account for one third of public spending, half of public investment and one fourth of tax revenues and, in many Member States, hold competencies in key areas such as education, economic development and cohesion, environment, social protection, health and services of general interest, hence the

¹ Resolution of the European Committee of the Regions — The European Committee of the Regions’ priorities for 2020-2025 — Europe closer to the people through its villages, cities and regions (OJ C 324, 1.10.2020, p. 8).

coordination of local, regional, national and European levels increases the legitimacy of the legislation, improves ownership and pursues more effectively the benefit of citizens;

- F. whereas the Committee pursues its political goal to strengthen its involvement in the entire Union political and legislative cycle while making more tangible the connection with Union citizens using the Committee's members as powerful multipliers in their communities and in their national associations of local and regional authorities;
 - G. whereas the Committee identified eleven key priority areas to make its action more strategic and impactful in 2023: (1) Follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe, Active Subsidiarity and Better Regulation; (2) Ukraine and Enlargement; (3) Energy and climate crisis; (4) Environment; (5) Cohesion Policy - Ramping up Cohesion policy implementation and shaping its future for the post-2027 period; (6) Multi-annual Financial Framework; (7) Economic governance for a fair and sustainable Europe; (8) European Year of Skills 2023; (9) Partnership for Regional Innovation and the promotion of territorial missions; (10) Civil protection; (11) Food security;
 - H. whereas Regulation (EU) 2021/1060², governing Union cohesion policy and funding between 2021 and 2027, that entered into force in July 2021, encompasses references to the partnership and multilevel governance principle, supported by the Committee and Parliament and entailing the involvement of regions;
 - I. whereas the over 400 national and regional programmes in place for the delivery of Union cohesion policy in the 2021-2027 programming period will make available around EUR 380 billion, under different funds, to tackle the economic, social and environmental challenges that Union regions and cities are facing;
 - J. whereas, on 19 February 2021, Regulation (EU) 2021/241³, establishing the Union's Recovery and Resilience Facility, entered into force, providing the legal basis for distributing funds and loans of up to EUR 672,5 billion (in 2018 prices) to the Member States between 2021 and 2026 and also aiming to support economic, social and territorial cohesion and to address disparities between the regions of the Union;
 - K. whereas, as a Union institution within the meaning of the Financial Regulation, the Committee is required to adopt its own annual accounts, prepared in accordance with the accounting rules adopted by the Commission's accounting officer (European Union Accounting Rules) and based on the International Public Sector Accounting Standards, which are ultimately consolidated into those of the Union;
1. Notes that the budget of the Committee falls under MFF heading 7 'European public

² Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy (OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 159, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1060/2024-06-30>).

³ Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility (OJ L 57, 18.2.2021, p. 17, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/241/2024-03-01>).

administration' ('Heading 7'), which amounted to a total of EUR 12,3 billion, i.e., 6,4 % of Union budget spending, in 2023; notes that, in 2023, the budget of the Committee represented 0,95 % of MFF Heading 7 appropriations;

2. Notes that the Court of Auditors (the 'Court'), in its annual report (the 'Court's report') for the financial year 2023, examined a sample of 70 transactions under Heading 7, of which 21 (30 %) contained errors; further notes that for five of those errors, which were quantified by the Court, the Court estimated a level of error below the materiality threshold;
3. Notes from the Court's report its observation that administrative expenditure comprises expenditure on human resources including pensions, which in 2023 accounted for about 70 % of the total administrative expenditure, and expenditure on buildings, equipment, energy, communications and information technology; welcomes the Court's renewed opinion that, overall, administrative spending is low risk;
4. Notes from the Court's report its opinion regarding a transaction made by the Committee in 2023, whereby the 10-year duration of a building maintenance contract was not sufficiently justified;

Budgetary and financial management

5. Notes from the Committee's annual activity report for 2023 (the 'Annual report') that the final adopted budget of the Committee was EUR 116 675 392 in 2023, including the Amending Budget 4/2023 (salary and energy related), representing an increase of EUR 6 698 534 (i.e. +6,10 %) compared to 2022; notes with satisfaction that the rate of the Committee's budget implementation of current year commitment appropriations increased from 99,20 % in 2022 to 99,9 % in 2023, and the current year payment appropriations execution rate increased from 88 % in 2022 to 91,20 % in 2023; welcomes further an increase in the execution rate of C8 appropriations from 81,60 % in 2022 to 85 % in 2023; considers that these high execution rates are on the one hand a sign of good budgetary and financial management by the Committee, on the account of strengthened budget execution monitoring, timely budget forecasting and reallocation of resources to address unforeseen events, but on the other hand could also be a sign that the Committee needs additional resources; calls on the Commission and the budgetary authority to take this into account in the framework of the budgetary procedure;
6. Notes that in the course of 2023, the Committee implemented 31 transfers for a total of EUR 2,84 million, of which 25 internal transfers for a total of EUR 0,98 million and six external transfers for a total of EUR 1,86 million, of which approximately EUR 0,8 million transferred to budget lines covering contracts impacted by high inflation/indexation; notes that impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine continued to create budgetary pressure for the Committee in 2023; notes in this context that the Committee was most affected by the high inflation rate, directly or indirectly, in areas such as travel costs (missions), energy, rents and lease of buildings, maintenance contracts, construction projects and paper and offset plates;
7. Notes an increase by approximately 20 % of payments made for the members of the Committee, from EUR 6 573 307 in 2022 to EUR 7 955 968 in 2023, with payments made for travel expenses (8 119 payments), travel allowances (4 449 payments), meeting allowances for in-person participation (7 845 payments) and remote

participation (152 payments);

8. Notes that the mission's budget (current year appropriations) remained stable, with EUR 420 833 in 2023 (compared to EUR 419 657 in 2022) and execution rate of approximately 80 % in 2023 (similar to 2022); notes that, despite an increase in the average cost of accommodation and travel costs, the Committee's missions budget remained stable due to a reduction of 13 % in the number of missions carried out in 2023 compared to 2022;
9. Observes an increase in the current year appropriations for interpreting services of approximately 19 %, from EUR 3,494 million in 2022 to EUR 4,167 million in 2022; asks the Committee to explain the reasons for that increase, given the fact that at the same time the Committee has reported savings in connection with the use of remote interpretation in 2023;
10. Notes that until 23 July 2023, the flat-rate remote meeting allowance paid by the Committee to its members, their alternates, as well as to rapporteurs' experts and speakers invited to attend remote or hybrid meetings was EUR 200; notes further that on that date, new rules on the matter entered into force setting the flat-rate remote meeting allowance at 50 % of the regular meeting allowance, with the latter being EUR 359 and the former EUR 179,50; notes in this context a significant decrease in the total amount paid for remote meeting allowances from EUR 1 742 000 in 2021 and EUR 489 600 in 2022 to EUR 32 632 in 2023, while the overall expenditure linked to budget line 1004 ('Travel and subsistence allowances, attendance at meetings and associated expenditure') has increased considerably from approximately EUR 6,6 million in 2022 to approximately 8 million in 2023, mainly due to a strong return to in-person meetings in 2023 and the increase in the travel related prices in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic;
11. Regrets that the average time for payment increased from 17,87 days in 2022 to 21,88 days in 2023; understands nevertheless that that increase is the result of the fact that in 2023 the Committee processed and paid a record number of invoices, i.e., 5 723 compared to 4 260 in 2022; notes in this context that the share of commercial invoices received electronically by the Committee has increased from 68 % in 2022 to 76 % in 2023 and continued to increase in 2024;

Internal management, performance and internal control

12. Notes that for 2023, as part of its annual operational plan, the reporting of the performance of the Committee was based on 25 objectives, the achievement of which was assessed through 80 quantitative indicators, whereas the targets of the majority of those indicators (approximately 75 %) was achieved with a level of 90 % or more;
13. Commends the Committee for its political achievements in its key priority areas in 2023; notes that the Committee pursues its mission through opinions, which refer to legislative proposals made by the Commission (referrals), own-initiative opinions, which call on the Union institutions to take action, and through resolutions, which highlight the Committee's positions on specific topics; notes that, in 2023, the Committee adopted 53 opinions and 6 resolutions, a decrease from 55 opinions and 8 resolutions adopted in 2022;

14. Appreciates that in 2023 the Committee continued implementing measures to modernise its administration and enhance cost-effectiveness in the context of the ‘Going for IMPact’ programme; notes in this context the progress made with regard to digitalisation and workflow optimisation, the modernisation of the Committee’s planning and reporting instruments, the creation of a central meeting service, and the enhancement of cooperation with other institutions or bodies (e.g., the European Economic and Social Committee (‘EESC’), Commission, Parliament, Office for Infrastructure and Logistics), among others; commends the Committee for having implemented almost 90 % of the simplification projects launched in 2021, in the areas of administrative processes, written procedures and (internal) legal documents;
15. Notes with satisfaction from the Committee’s replies to the questionnaire submitted by the [Parliament's](#) Committee on Budgetary Control for the 2023 budgetary discharge (the ‘Questionnaire’) that, thanks to the ‘Going for IMPact’ programme, the Committee has managed in 2023 to align its objectives to the available resources which were under pressure as a result of the inflationary effects of the war in Ukraine; commends in particular the progress made by the Committee in implementing ‘Project Convergence’ (a SharePoint-based tool for planning, reporting, risk assessment, and business continuity) and the new business continuity policy;
16. Acknowledges the impact of the Committee’s work, in particular its opinions, some which were reflected in resolutions, positions, proposals, reports, reviews, conclusions or trilogues of the Commission, Parliament or the Council in 2023; invites the Committee to continue on the path of providing useful and relevant input, such as data from the ground and analysis, to Union institutions and other beneficiaries of Union policies; welcomes the Committee’s strengthened involvement along the whole political and legislative cycle of the Union through cooperation agreements and action plans with the Commission, Parliament and the European Investment Bank; notes that, in 2023, Committee members also met the Council and Permanent Representations and participated in the events organised by the Council’s Presidency, in order to ensure that the Committee’s positions are reflected in the Union’s legislation; congratulates the Committee for strengthening its involvement in legislative trilogues, notably by being granted access, for the first time, to trilogue documents in 2023;
17. Notes with regard to its new internal control framework, that the Committee implemented a new methodology on ex post controls, which, in 2023, focused on the basic salary and the time worked, with 55 files having been verified; notes further that in 2023 the Committee renewed its compliance and effectiveness exercise to assess the extent of the Committee’s compliance with certain internal control standards and the effectiveness of their implementation; commends the Committee for reporting an improvement in this matter compared to the results of the 2022 exercise; notes with satisfaction, as regards the new sensitive posts policy, that in 2023 the Committee ran a screening exercise to identify the level of risk of each post and, thus, the sensitivity level thereof, as well as the necessary measures to mitigate those risks;
18. Notes that the Committee launched in 2023 two new audits: one on the compliance of various functions (e.g., risk management, planning, control system) with the relevant data protection legislation and another one on the performance of the IT organisation in Joint Services (the Committee and the EESC’s new joint Directorate for Innovation and IT); notes that for each of those audits: 11 recommendations were issued and seven

recommendations were considered very important; notes further that following the audit on management of the vacant posts launched in 2022, 10 recommendations were issued, three of which were very important; calls on the Committee to implement all pending recommendations as soon as possible and keep the discharge authority informed of progress in this matter;

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

19. Notes that, at the end of 2023, the Committee had a total of 559 members of staff (seconded national experts, interim, intra muros and trainees not included), compared to 533 in 2022; notes that 74 contract agents, compared to 56 contract agents in 2022 and 96 temporary agents, compared to 89 temporary agents in 2022, were employed by the Committee at the end of 2023, out of which 21 contract agents had an open-ended contract, 53 contract agents had a time-limited contract, 53 temporary agents were on permanent posts with time-limited contract, 50 temporary agents had an open-ended contract and 3 temporary agents held a temporary position (in two cases with an indefinite contract and, in the case of the Secretary-General, for a fixed duration of five years); notes, in addition, that the Committee employed 5 interim agents and 12 external members of staff working on-site, excluding external service providers in the fields of logistics and IT; notes that in 2023 the occupation rate of the posts in the establishment plan was 98 % (an increase from 96 % in 2022) and the turnover rate was 6,6 % (a decrease from 10,80 % in 2022), respectively;
20. Observes an increase of reliance of the Committee on contract agents and temporary agents (representing up to 26 % of the Committee's staff); notes from the Questionnaire that said reliance is due in particular to the absence of EPSO reserve lists for generalist administrator profiles since 2018; is worried that the Committee's long-term stability and business continuity are threatened by the absence of attractiveness of the time-limited contracts offered; supports the Committee in its endeavours to respond to those challenges by, for example, organising internal competitions; asks the Committee to report to the discharge authority on such competitions organised in 2024;
21. Notes that, as a result of a pilot project on a hybrid working regime and a staff satisfaction survey launched in 2022, the Committee adopted on 1 January 2024 a decision which provides for a hybrid working regime and a personalised weekly working schedule for each staff, as well as the possibility to work from home for up to 60 % of staff's working time (except for staff categories incompatible with telework) and work from outside the city of employment for up to 15 days per year;
22. Notes with satisfaction that the Committee's hybrid working regime has had a positive impact with regard to short-term sick leave, whereas: - the number of staff without sick leave increased from 71 (or 12 % of all staff) in 2018 to 211 (or 36 % of all staff) in 2023; - the number of staff on sick leave for less than seven days decreased from 257 (or 46 % of all staff) in 2018 to 201 (or 35 % of all staff) in 2023 and; - the number of staff on sick leave for a duration between 7,5 and 21 days decreased from 140 (or 25 % of all staff) in 2018 to 92 (or 16 % of all staff) in 2023; invites the Committee to monitor the impact of the new working regime and keep this topic in upcoming staff satisfaction surveys; notes with satisfaction that 90,25 % (82 % in the case of managers) of those that responded to the staff survey of December 2022 indicated their satisfaction with the flexible arrangements;

23. Notes that 18 cases of burnout (compared to 16 cases in 2022) were reported in the Committee in 2023; notes further that the Committee managed to reintegrate 16 members of staff in 2023 after long-term absence as a result of burnout, thanks to a personalised follow-up of long-term sickness leave; welcomes the preventive actions taken by the Committee to reduce psychosocial risks and burnout; appreciates in this regard the proactive approach of the medical service and the awareness-raising conferences, trainings and courses organised by the Committee;
24. Notes that in 2023 the Committee continued to raise awareness of the measures put in place to prevent and combat harassment in the workplace, in accordance with its Decision of 26 April 2021 on protecting dignity at work, managing conflict and combatting harassment, notably through dedicated guidance, internal communication and the organisation of several information sessions for staff and managers; welcomes in particular the organisation of five training sessions on 'Preventing psychological and sexual harassment' and 'Respect and Dignity for a high-performing team' in 2023;
25. Commends the Committee for its actions taken in 2023 in connection with the integration of persons with disabilities, such as making accessible the Committee's buildings to persons with reduced mobility and ensuring that all job vacancies are accessible to candidates with disabilities;
26. Notes that, in 2022, the Committee was employing staff representing all EU nationalities (and one staff member of Ukrainian nationality), with some of them being overrepresented (e.g., Belgium); welcomes the additional efforts of the Committee aiming at balancing the geographical distribution among staff by targeting a wider audience through the publication on its website and social media of calls for expression of interest for contract and temporary staff; asks the Committee to keep the discharge authority informed of the outcome of this type of action;

Ethical framework and transparency

27. Welcomes the work done by the Committees in 2023 to consolidate ethical rules and practices into a single ethical legal framework (Decision n^o 157/2023) covering disciplinary procedure, dignity at work, conflict management, combatting harassment, outside activities and whistleblowing among others; notes that that work culminated with a decision (n^o 157/2023) which was the outcome of comprehensive consultations with different stakeholders, as well as a follow-up to an internal survey on staff ethics awareness and the implementation of an internal audit recommendation on that topic; commends the Committee for continuing to offer training courses on ethics, integrity and respect and dignity at work to different groups of staff ranging from newcomers, managers and staff overall in 2023;
28. Notes that OLAF processed two cases in 2023: one case on alleged outside gainful activities of a Committee member and another case on allegations of recidivism on unauthorised external activities by a staff member; notes that in the former case no OLAF investigation was opened on the grounds of lack of proportionality between the resources needed to conduct an investigation and the expected results, while the Committee considered that there were no conflicts of interest on the grounds that Committee members do not receive any remuneration from the Union, nor are they required to declare their professional activities, for which they may be paid for local or

regional mandates that those members may have; notes with regard to the latter case that OLAF opened an investigation which was concluded with two recommendations, which the Committee implemented by opening a disciplinary procedure against the staff member concerned and by recovering gains in connection with that person's unauthorised outside activities; recalls that the case closed in 2022 on allegations of financial wrongdoings, harassment and mismanagement in a Committee-EESC joint service, gave rise to a conflict-management exercise involving the persons concerned and to a five-point action plan; notes with satisfaction from the Committee's follow-up report to Parliament's discharge decision covering the Committee's budget implementation year 2022 that that action plan was fully implemented by the end of 2023;

29. Recalls that the Committee adopted Regulation n^o 6/2023 of 4 July 2023 laying down transparency measures that focus on office-holding members and rapporteurs; commends in this context the Committee for having formally joined the EU Transparency Register on 1 January 2024;
30. Welcomes the Committee's renewed efforts in the area of detection and prevention of conflicts of interest in 2023; notes that thanks to its Decision n^o157/2023, the Committee defined the concept of conflicts of interest and has put in place a mechanism to detect and prevent it whereby staff are required to declare whether they might have a conflict of interest (potential or possible), by filling in a form at various key moments of their career or professional activities; notes with satisfaction from the Questionnaire that the annual information regarding the occupation activities of former senior officials is published in a transparent way on the Committee's website; notes that the Committee did not detect any situations of conflicts of interest, which would have required follow-up by the administration in 2023;
31. Notes that no cases of whistleblowing were reported to the Committee in 2023, except for information received from OLAF about a whistleblowing case against a staff member of the Committee, which was eventually dismissed by OLAF; notes that the Committee did not adopt any new measures concerning whistleblowing in 2023 and continued to rely on the measures in place since 2015 and to promote them through ethics training;
32. Notes that the Committee has had in place a range of anti-fraud measures and actions applicable to its members and its staff which are implemented by different services; notes with satisfaction from the Questionnaire the Committee's commitment to further strengthen the existing anti-fraud measures by adopting an anti-fraud strategy in 2025; asks the Committee to keep the discharge authority informed on this matter;

Digitalisation, cybersecurity and data protection

33. Notes that the combined IT budget of the Committee and the EESC was EUR 12,7 million in 2023, compared to EUR 11,712 million in 2022, i.e., a decrease of 8,40 %, whereas EUR 350 000 of that budget was paid for cybersecurity in 2023;
34. Welcomes the Committee's new 'Digital Strategy 2024-2026' adopted at the end of 2023; commends in this context the Committee for its digitalisation progress made in 2023 in different areas such as the administrative processes (including staff selection), procurement and interpretation, among others;

35. Notes with satisfaction that 90 % of the projects for simplification through digitalisation under the ‘Going for impact’ initiative were fully implemented by the end of 2023; notes in addition that further efficiencies were tapped due to an IT project to define the best tool for the electronic management of form-based workflows with, as a result, many of the Committee’s processes having begun to be simplified and digitalised through Microsoft 365 tools; notes with satisfaction that the Committee uses procurement modules such as e-Tendering, e-Notices, e-Submission, MyWorkplace, as well as the qualified electronic signature, for the signature of contracts, introduced in 2023; welcomes the adoption by the Committee of internal guidelines on use of artificial intelligence laying the ground for possible future solutions;
36. Notes further that the European Data Protection Supervisor (‘EDPS’) did not conduct any investigation or enquiry into the processing of personal data by the Committee in 2023; notes that in 2023 the EDPS launched a general questionnaire on the designation and position of the data protection officer (DPO), which was answered by the Committee’s DPO;
37. Notes that the Committee did not encounter any cyber-attacks in 2023, other than certain denial of service attacks against the Committee’s externally hosted website; notes from the Questionnaire of the Committee’s tools and strategies for real-time threat monitoring and identifying vulnerabilities in the Committee’s systems; commends the Committee for adhering to standards in matters related to cybersecurity-related risk assessments, as well as for having put in place a system based on incident response plans, recovery measures and lessons learned; notes with satisfaction that the Committee and the EESC adopted the NIST Cybersecurity Framework with focus, in 2023, on the principles: ‘protect’ and ‘detect’;

Buildings

38. Notes that the Committee’s budget (current year appropriations) in 2023 was EUR 18,594 million (compared to EUR 18,930 million in 2022) with a payment execution rate of 93,70 % (compared to 82,60 % in 2022); notes with satisfaction that, as result of exchanging the B68 and TRE74 buildings for the VMA building in 2022, savings were achieved due to lower costs of renting the entire VMA in 2023;
38. Notes that renovation works of the VMA (third to ninth floor) continued in 2023; notes further a low payment execution rate with regard to the C8 appropriations (carried over from 2022 to 2023), i.e., 18,90 %, used for the fitting-out of the VMA premises; understands the Committee’s explanation for that low rate whereas the contractor was not able to finish parts of the renovation works in the VMA buildings; reiterates its call to the Committee to provide the discharge authority with an update on the return on investment in relation to the smart technologies installed in the VMA;
40. Welcomes the commitment of the Committee and the EESC to apply systematically the ‘design for all’ principle to their infrastructure, ensuring accessibility of their building by design; notes that the Committees took a range of different measures to ensure accessibility of their buildings to people with various kinds of disabilities (wheelchair users, blind and visually impaired people, deaf persons, elderly people with muscular or vascular problems);

Environment and sustainability

41. Notes that the Committee continued to implement a variety of green practices in 2023, such as the use of innovative energy-efficient building installations, the purchase of 100 % green electricity, the replacement of paperless workflows with digital signatures, the application of environmental criteria in all tender procedures (with customised green criteria for calls for tender above EUR 60 000), a focus on waste reduction and increase in the recycling rate, the implementation of measures for a more sustainable travel by staff, including financial contributions by the Committee to its staff's public transport costs, the use of full remote interpretation for statutory meetings, and other energy saving measures; notes with satisfaction from the Questionnaire a reduction of carbon emissions linked to the Committee's administration's activities by 18 % compared to 2019;
42. Notes with satisfaction from the questionnaire that, thanks to its energy saving measures, the Committee's energy consumption was reduced by an estimated 3,4 % in 2023 compared to 2022, corresponding to a financial gain of EUR 64 240; congratulates the Committees for having exceeded the EMAS objectives for 2021-2025 in all areas (electricity, gas, water, waste, waste sorting, paper for office use, CO₂ emissions);

Interinstitutional cooperation

43. Welcomes the budgetary and administrative savings achieved through interinstitutional cooperation, and in particular the close cooperation established at administrative level with the EESC, with which the Committee shares premises and joint services in the areas of translation, infrastructure, logistics and IT, with 470 members of staff and approximately EUR 60 million (excluding salary related expenditures) pooled together by both institutions in 2023; notes with satisfaction that the Committee further extended its cooperation with the EESC by exploiting additional synergies through joint medical services and joint central data protection register and processing operations based on the Joint Controllership Arrangement signed by the Committee and the EESC in 2023;
44. Welcomes the Committee's search for synergies by purchasing services from other institutions through service-level agreements and by participating in interinstitutional coordination bodies and interinstitutional procurement procedures; welcomes the efficiency gains, with regard to the communication for the 2024 European elections, reported by the Committee in the Questionnaire; notes that those gains were possible because the Committee signed with Parliament a Memorandum of Understanding in February 2024 and a new Cooperation Agreement (CP) in May 2024; notes further that the CP also covered cooperation at political and administrative level between the two institutions;
45. Notes that the Committee cooperates with the Commission (for an annual fee) for the handling of HR matters and the use of various IT platforms for financial management and HR; notes further that the Committee holds its plenary sessions in the premises of Parliament and the Commission to compensate for the lack of capacity in its own conference rooms and buys interpreting services from those two institutions;

Communication

46. Notes that the Committee's communication activities focus on relationship with press, organisation of events and digital content and social media with a total budget (current year appropriations) of approximately EUR 2,8 million in 2023; regrets a very low

payment execution rate in those areas (ranging from 24,70 % to 48,20 %); notes nevertheless a high execution rate with regard to C8 appropriations (carried over from 2022 to 2023) of between 98 % and 100 %; asks the Committee to take measures for improving its budgetary planning with regard to communication related budgetary items;

47. Notes with satisfaction the Committee's achievements in promoting Union policies and programs at local and regional level, improving the outreach of its consultative works and enhancing its visibility and impact; notes in this context the Committee's communication actions in 2023 in areas such as: - cohesion (e.g., the 'Promoting cohesion as a fundamental value of the Union' campaign in the framework of the EURegionsWeek with more than 8 000 participants); - climate change (e.g., the 'Building resilient and innovative local communities' campaign); -democracy (e.g., the 'A new chapter for EU democracy' campaign with 1 400 registrations for participation at the 14th EuropCom conference); - rural development (the '2023 LEADER European Congress' conference) in 2023; commends the Committee for the increase in the number of persons registered in the Network of Regional and Local EU Councillors (from 2 307 in 2022 to 3 000 in 2023) and the number of participants in the Young Elected Politicians programme (from 775 in 2022 to 836 in 2023);
48. Notes the Committee's success with regard to media outreach as shown by the overall metrics for 2023, such as: 13 210 media mentions, 129 % increase on web visitors and 11 % increase on followers; notes that in terms of digital engagement, the Committee fell short of achieving its target for 2023; notes that, at the end of 2023, the Committee had 200 000 followers on its social media channels, i.e., 15 % more than in 2022 of which 57 603 followers (+5 %) on X (ex-Twitter), 61 170 (+5 %) on Facebook, 68 613 (+31 %) on LinkedIn and 15 392 (+47 %) on Instagram;
49. Notes with satisfaction from the Questionnaire the Committee's initiatives to raise awareness about the specific measures of the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Acts, as well as cybersecurity and online safety; acknowledges the Committee's role in advancing the Union's path to a digital future; commends in this context the Committee for organising in 2023 the Digital Masterclass series, for both staff and external audiences.