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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 X – European External Action Service
(2024/2024(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 X – European External Action Service (2024/2024(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)0272 – C10-0072/2024)²,
- having regard to the European External Action Service’s annual activity report for 2023 and its annual report on budgetary and financial management for 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 and 260 to 263 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 and 266 to 269 thereof,
- having regard to Council Decision 2010/427/EU of 26 July 2010 establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service⁷, and in particular

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/ <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/2509/oj>.

⁷ OJ L 201, 3.8.2010, p. 30, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2010/427/oj>.

Article 8 thereof,

- having regard to Rule 102 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Foreign Affairs,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A10-0000/2025),
1. Grants the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European External Action Service for the financial year 2023 / Postpones its decision on granting the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the European External Action Service 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 European External Action Service, the Council, the Commission and the Court of Auditors, the European Ombudsman and the European Data Protection Supervisor, 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 X – European External Action Service (2024/2024(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 X – European External Action Service,
 - having regard to Rule 102 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Foreign Affairs,
 - 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 European External Action Service (the ‘EEAS’) is responsible for the management of the administrative expenditure of its Headquarters in Brussels and for the network of the 144 Union delegations and offices;
- C. whereas the EEAS’ responsibility has been extended to cover the administrative management of the Commission staff in the delegations through a series of Service Level Arrangements (SLAs);
- D. whereas the role of the delegations is to represent the Union and its citizens around the world by building networks and partnerships, and to promote the values of the Union;
- E. whereas the peculiarity of the EEAS remains in its nature and origin, as it was when it was formed by the merging of staff belonging to the former external relation departments of the Council and of the Commission, into which diplomats from the Member States have been integrated;
- F. whereas under the EEAS Internal Rules, the Secretary-General of the EEAS acts as authorising officer by delegation for the institution and the director-general for resource management has the role of principal sub-delegated authorising officer;
- G. whereas the powers conferred by the Staff Regulations on the Appointing Authority are exercised by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President (‘HR/VP’) in respect of staff of the EEAS;
- H. whereas the implementation of the budget is governed by the Financial Regulation and

by the Internal Rules of implementation of the Budget of the EEAS;

1. Notes that the budget of the EEAS falls under MFF heading 7, ‘European public administration’, which amounted to EUR 12,3 billion in 2023 (representing 6,4 % of the total Union budget); notes that the EEAS budget of approximately EUR 1,1 billion represents approximately 9,2 % of the total administrative expenditure of the Union;
2. Notes that the Court of Auditors (the ‘Court’), in its annual report for the financial year 2023 examined a sample of 70 transactions under administration, 10 more than were examined in 2022; further notes that the Court writes that administrative expenditure comprises expenditure on human resources, including expenditure on pensions, which in 2023 accounted for about 70 % of the total administrative expenditure, and expenditure on buildings, equipment, energy, communications and information technology, and that its work over many years indicates that, overall, this spending is low risk;
3. Notes that 21 (30 %) of the 70 transactions contained errors but that the Court, based on the five errors which were quantified, estimates the level of error to be below the materiality threshold;
4. Notes that the Court, in its annual report for the financial year 2023, found a quantifiable error in one of the 13 payments examined and raised six non-quantifiable findings concerning the EEAS; notes that the quantifiable error concerned the absence of a valid procurement procedure before a rental contract was signed for a Union delegation; notes that, in 2023, the EEAS took measures to address the two quantifiable errors found by the Court in its 2022 annual report and took measures to avoid such issues in the future;

Budgetary and financial management

5. Notes that the final EEAS budget for 2023 was EUR 821 900 280, representing an increase of 4,45 % compared to 2022; notes that the EEAS also disposed of an amount of EUR 259,7 million (including assigned revenues and carried over amounts) from the Commission to cover the administrative costs of Commission staff working in Union delegations; notes further that the EEAS received additional fixed-amount contributions to cover common costs of European Development Fund staff in delegations and co-locations, as well as other amounts received under co-location and other agreements; notes that the total budgetary amount managed by the EEAS in 2023 therefore amounted to EUR 1 198,2 million (commitment appropriations), which represented an increase of 4,8 % compared to the previous year;
6. Notes that, in 2023, the budgetary implementation rate of commitment appropriations stood at 100 %, whereas the implementation rate for payments was 91,9 % compared to 90,6 % in 2022; notes that the average time for payment was 13,57 days but notes nevertheless that 8,63 % of the total amount was paid late, which led to EUR 50 253,91 in late interest payments in 2023; calls on the EEAS to continue its efforts in improving the number of electronic payments and the digitalisation of workflows, in particular in delegations;

7. Notes that the EEAS informed the budgetary authority of two budgetary transfers in accordance with Article 29(1) of the Financial Regulation and made 11 autonomous transfers in accordance with Article 29(4), for an overall value of EUR 55,7 million; notes that the main purpose of the transfers was to increase budget line 3003 on buildings and associate costs in delegations by EUR 18,97 million and budget lines 3001 on External Staff and outside services in delegations by EUR 5,6 million; notes that further to the transfers, the final budget for the EEAS headquarters amounted to EUR 327,8 million and the final budget for delegations amounted to EUR 494,1 million;
8. Notes that, in 2023, the EEAS has been faced with growing political and financial challenges, as well as challenges with respect to Human Rights and the Rule of Law; notes that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its geopolitical consequences continued to be a key issue in 2023, leading the EEAS to ensure wide-range support for Ukraine, exert pressure on Russia and continue its global outreach to address the wider consequences of the war, including the implementation of the Action Plan on the geopolitical consequences of Russian aggression against Ukraine; notes that the financial ceiling of the European Peace Facility managed under the authority of the HR/VP was increased from EUR 5,6 million to more than EUR 12 million in 2023; notes that the reignited Israel-Palestine conflict following the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023 required the EEAS to engage in intense diplomatic efforts, encourage Union institutions to urge regional de-escalation, respond to humanitarian needs and support regional peace efforts;
9. Notes that, for 2023, the EEAS reported significant budgetary constraints, leading to drastic cuts and budget optimisation in order to cope with inflation in third countries, fluctuations in local currencies, an increase in prices, in particular the cost of renting office space, IT, security and energy prices, which exposed the EEAS to much higher running costs in foreign countries, thus affecting its ability to function effectively and to fulfil its duty of care towards the staff posted in delegations; notes that, as a result of the budgetary pressures, the EEAS postponed infrastructure maintenance, set aside or cancelled security expenditures in delegations and made cuts to budget posts, such as cuts to the mission and representation budget, office supplies and training courses; deplores that, for budgetary reasons, the EEAS had to prioritise staff participation in election observation missions over other types of missions, such as follow-up missions;
10. Notes that, in 2023, the EEAS, both at the EEAS headquarters and in delegations, launched a total of 28 open public procurement procedures, 27 competitive procedures with negotiations, 14 negotiated procedures without prior publication of a contract notice, 6 restricted procedures and 2 negotiated procedures for middle-value works contracts, which were successful and led to the award of a contract in 52 % of cases on average; notes that the high standards and complexity of Union procurement rules might be one of the reasons for the relatively high number of failed procurement procedures, as the application of those rules might be challenging for tenderers, especially in local markets; welcomes that, for external actions, procurement rules have been simplified in the recast of the Financial Regulation;
11. Welcomes that the number of co-locations with Member States and other Union partners in Union delegations was 138 at the end of 2023, 12 more than in 2022; notes

that, out of the total number of co-locations in 2023, 42 were concluded with Member States and Partner Countries, 91 with other Union partners and five were reverse co-locations; notes that, in 2023, co-locations represented 8 % of the total office surface in Union delegations and involved more than half of the Union delegations (75), which can be seen as an example of successful optimisation of the EEAS building management, but also as an indicator of the increased interest of partners in sharing premises in third countries and the relevance of co-location in diplomatic affairs;

12. Notes that the budget for missions was EUR 18 948 650 in 2023, representing a limited increase of 1,46 % compared to the previous year, the aim of which was to compensate the increase in costs due to inflation, but was insufficient when compared with the actual rise in travel costs in 2023; notes that the EEAS does not have a separate budget line for missions and travel for the High Representative(HR)/Vice President(VP) and that the missions and travel costs for the HR/VP are shared between the EEAS and the Commission depending on the purpose of the mission; notes finally, that for 2023, the EEAS had costs of EUR 2 995,14 on 6 missions for the HR/VP and air-taxi costs of EUR 588 103, corresponding to an increase of 229 % compared to 2022; asks the EEAS to explain the reasons for that increase;

Internal management, performance and internal control

13. Notes that, following an internal reorganisation, the EEAS created a new Corporate Governance Service in October 2023, composed of three divisions in charge of inspections, internal audit and planning, reporting and compliance, to enable the EEAS to achieve greater accountability, better management and better monitoring of activities; notes that a Corporate Governance Board was also established to ensure coherence on corporate management issues in the EEAS; notes furthermore that the EEAS created the Managing Directorate for Peace, Security and Defence (MD PSD), the Peace, Partnership and Crisis Management Directorate and two new Divisions dedicated to “Hybrid Threats and Cyber” and “Maritime Security” in order to better support the Union’s work in security and defence matters;
14. Notes that, in 2023, the Corporate Governance Service performed a fitness check on governance processes and policies; welcomes that, as part of that process, the EEAS updated the Audit Progress Committee charter, revised its internal control framework, its annual management plan and its risk management framework;
15. Notes that, in line with the EEAS Audit Plan for 2023, three audits were finalised in 2023, namely an audit on the management of the registry of exceptions and non-compliance and two audits on the management of local agents’ salaries and the recruitment and management of local agents and equivalent local staff; notes furthermore that, due to an organisational restructuring and corresponding staff turnover in the internal audit function, a planned audit on security could not be launched in 2023 and that such audit will be reassessed in the framework of the preparation of the 2025-27 multiannual strategic internal audit plan; notes that 4 critical and 49 very important audit recommendations related to finalised audits remained open in 2023;
16. Notes that, in December 2023, the Court adopted its final report following its audit on

the coordination role of the EEAS, the scope of which was to assess whether the coordination, in particular with regard to information management, staffing and reporting, both internally and with the Commission and Council, was effective; notes that, in 2023, some of the audit recommendations had already been covered by ongoing initiatives, such as the sending of mission letters to the newly appointed Ambassadors before taking up duty and the efforts made by the EEAS since 2019 to implement its Information Management Strategy; asks that Parliament be kept informed on the follow-up of the Court's recommendations;

17. Notes that, based on the 26 inspections carried out in delegations in 2023, security, buildings and administrative burden were identified as the main challenges for delegations; notes that the EEAS has put in place security risk management measures in delegations based on international standards and best practices; notes that, in 2023, five critical recommendations were formulated by the EEAS inspection service, all related to the management of three delegations; notes that in all cases, the recommendations were addressed through increased oversight and support from the EEAS headquarters; welcomes the toolbox developed by the EEAS to respond to internal management situations;

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

18. Notes that, at the end 2023, the occupation rate of the establishment plan was at 96,7 %; notes that the EEAS was employing a total of 2 812 members of staff, including 1 245 officials, 450 temporary agents, 603 contract agents and 514 seconded national experts (SNEs); notes that out of the total number of officials and temporary agents employed by the EEAS, either in its headquarters or in delegations, 62,5 % was made up of administrators, 32,8 % was made up of assistants and 4,8 % was made up of secretaries;
19. Notes that 5 252 people in total were working in the EEAS at the end of 2023, employed either directly by the EEAS or through external contractors, from which 46,2 % were working in the EEAS headquarters and 53,8 % in delegations; notes that out of the total number of people working in the EEAS, 46,5 % were non-statutory staff or external contractors; notes that the largest number of external staff employed by an external contractor but working in the premises of the EEAS provide services in the areas of information technology, security and safety and medical care;
20. Notes that, in 2023, the EEAS received 36 full-time equivalents from the budgetary authority, including 31 contract agents and five cost-shared SNEs; notes that the additional resources were allocated to crisis management functions, to the implementation of the Strategic Compass and to other EEAS priorities; notes that, at the end of 2023, the EEAS received an additional 20 cost-free SNEs for the Military Planning and Conduct Capability structures;
21. Notes that, in its decision adopted in July 2023, the HR/VP clarified that the maximum duration of the engagement by the EEAS of temporary and contract staff was 8 years in a reference period of 13 years or, in exceptional circumstances and in the interests of the service, 10 years in a reference period of 15 years and that the minimum lapse of time between successive engagements for temporary agents seconded from national diplomatic services of the Member States was 2 years from the termination of their last

contract;

22. Welcomes that all Member States are represented in the EEAS staff; notes however that some imbalances persist with Belgium being the most overrepresented Member State making up 12,1 % of total staff employed by the EEAS; notes also that among managers, Italy is the most overrepresented Member State, with 15 % of all managerial positions being occupied by Italians; notes that out of 141 Union Ambassadors, three Member States still do not occupy any Ambassador posts (Hungary, Luxembourg and Malta), whereas the Member States with most Ambassadors are France with 22, Spain and Italy with 16, Germany with 12 and Belgium with 10, meaning that these five countries occupy 54 % of all Ambassador posts; notes with satisfaction that this is a reduction compared to last year, when the same five countries occupied 57 % of the Ambassador posts; reiterates its call on the EEAS to continue to ensure a sound geographical balance throughout its organisation and on all levels;
23. Notes that a major rotation exercise of 52 management posts in delegations was organised in 2023; welcomes the efforts deployed by the EEAS to raise the awareness of Member States in relation to the need to attract a wide range of candidates to the published posts and to propose qualified candidates for the Union Ambassador posts;
24. Notes that, in 2023, the EEAS adopted its Agenda for Diversity and Inclusion 2023-2025, a detailed action plan to promote a safe and respectful working environment and a zero tolerance approach towards harassment; notes that staff representatives, staff associations and the Joint Committee for Equal Opportunities, which was renamed as the Joint Committee on Diversity and Inclusion, were consulted on both documents; notes that the action plan contains anti-harassment preventive measures, such as a mandatory e-learning training course for all staff on “Recognising and addressing harassment at work” and a mandatory management training on “How to create an harassment free work environment”;
25. Notes with concern that, in 2023, the EEAS received three requests for assistance for allegations of psychological harassment involving two officials which led to two administrative enquiries, one of which is still ongoing and the other was closed with a disciplinary sanction; notes that, under the informal procedure, the EEAS mediation service dealt with 28 cases involving allegations of psychological harassment and 10 cases of sexual harassment and that the Confidential Counsellors dealt with 21 cases of allegations of psychological harassment and 6 cases of sexual harassment in 2023; notes that, in 2023, the EEAS prepared a decision on anti-harassment for local staff in delegations, which was adopted in June 2024;
26. Notes that, in 2023, the EEAS took several measures to ensure the physical and mental wellbeing of its staff, including a systematic health check for all staff before being posted to a delegation, psychological support and awareness-raising actions; notes that, in October 2023, two decisions on working time and flexible working arrangements were adopted, following which flexitime became the default working time regime in the EEAS headquarters and in delegations for all staff, except managers; notes furthermore that the decisions authorise teleworking for up to two days per week in the EEAS headquarters, one day per week in delegations and 10 days per year away from the place

of employment for all; notes that, exceptional teleworking for a longer period has remained possible in the event of crises, for medical or other imperative reasons;

27. Is concerned that the EEAS members of staff on long-term sick leave for more than 50 days increased from 111 members of staff in 2022 to 171 members of staff in 2023, equivalent to an increase of 54 %; notes that the medical service implemented several measures to prevent the risk of burnout, such as the recruitment of a psychiatrist in December 2023 and a more systematic follow-up of sick leave by the medical service, psychological support and guidance to both staff and managers, awareness-raising activities and the creation of a mental health first aiders network;

Ethical framework and transparency

28. Notes that, in 2023, the EEAS improved its ethical framework by issuing new instructions to prohibit or limit the missions with costs partially or totally paid by external sources to avoid risks of conflicts of interest by sending a reminder on ethics to all staff; notes that the EEAS also focused on organising specific training courses on ethics, conflicts of interest, internal control and anti-fraud targeted at and adapted to different audiences in the EEAS headquarters and in delegations; notes furthermore that the 16 ‘principles of professional behaviour’ adopted in 2022 continued to be distributed to newcomers and promoted widely, in particular during the ‘Ethics and integrity’ and ‘Anti-harassment policy’ courses; asks that Parliament be kept informed by the EEAS of any further development of its ethical framework;
29. Welcomes that, in October 2023, the EEAS adopted a new Anti-Fraud Strategy, applicable to all staff in the EEAS headquarters and in delegations, which resulted from a thorough review process of fraud-related risks and was formally endorsed by OLAF; notes that the EEAS devoted particular efforts to staff training and guidance, in particular through the anti-fraud cell established in December 2022; notes that the EEAS staff posted in Union delegations actively participated in a series of workshops and seminars on fraud awareness and prevention, that staff newly assigned to a Union delegation systematically received training on these issues prior to taking up posts and that the intranet page related to anti-fraud was further revamped with the aim of facilitating the reporting of potential fraud cases and providing a wider range of options for anti-fraud training;
30. Notes that the EEAS did not receive any whistleblowing cases in 2023; notes that, in 2023, the EEAS started to develop a dedicated whistleblower protection policy in line with the new Anti-Fraud Strategy; asks that Parliament be kept informed about its adoption, scheduled for 2025, and its implementation across the service;
31. Notes that, in 2023, the EEAS received five declarations of conflicts of interest, which were handled in accordance with the applicable rules; notes that, in a case related to a member of an evaluation committee in a procurement procedure, the authorising officer by subdelegation concluded that there was a potential conflict of interest and relieved the member of staff from the duty of member of the evaluation committee;
32. Notes with concern that OLAF opened eight investigations in 2023, which are still ongoing, concerning potential misconduct in the context of procurement procedures and implementation of contracts, grant agreements or potential irregularities related to

human-resource matters; notes that the open cases in 2023 concerned officials, temporary agents and local agents both in the EEAS headquarters and in delegations; asks that Parliament be kept informed regarding the follow-up to those investigations; notes that eight older cases involving former and current staff were closed, with recommendations to take further action in five cases; notes that the EEAS is in regular contact with OLAF through its anti-fraud cell and ensures the timely follow-up of OLAF recommendations;

33. Notes that, in 2023, the EEAS handled ten requests from the Ombudsman, nine of which related to administrative files and one to a request for access to documents; notes that the Ombudsman found no instances of maladministration or partial maladministration and did not issue any recommendation to the EEAS;
34. Notes that, in his/her capacity as Vice-President of the Commission, the HR/VP is bound by the rules of the Transparency Register; stresses that while the EEAS is not an Institution within the meaning of Article 13 of the Treaty on European Union and does not have a direct role in Union law, it does, however, have an important role in Union law with regard to decisions concerning sanctions and the negotiation of international trade agreements, which have a considerable regulatory impact; notes that it would be of great relevance for the EEAS to adopt transparency measures and notify them to the management board of the Transparency Register; invites the EEAS to publish all meetings with all types of lobby organisations, including those of Heads of Union Delegations, in order to improve transparency; asks that Parliament be kept informed of any new initiative taken by the EEAS to improve transparency;

Digitalisation, cybersecurity and data protection

35. Notes that the expenditures for IT projects, equipment and cybersecurity increased from EUR 19,7 million in 2022 to EUR 29,9 million in 2023, corresponding to an increase of 52 %; notes that, in 2023, the EEAS launched important digitalisation projects, such as its collaborative platform 'HIVE' for all users at headquarters and delegations and deployed its Corporate Classified Communications and Information System (EC3IS) at the EEAS headquarters, before its progressive rolling out in sensitive delegations and interconnecting it with the corresponding systems at the Commission and at the Council;
36. Notes that, in 2023, the EEAS started to host and control an AI environment so that a complete AI governance model could be put in place; notes that this technical step established the grounds for the adoption of guidelines on the use of generative AI and of an AI Strategy in 2024, as well as running proofs of concept;
37. Notes that, part of the implementation of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence adopted in 2022, the EEAS was involved in the adoption of major policy documents and toolboxes related *inter alia* to cyber defence, cyber diplomacy, hybrid threats, foreign interference and information manipulation; notes that, internally, the EEAS continued to improve its cybersecurity capabilities via the recruitment of specialised staff and to provide cyber-awareness activities to different audiences including the Security Management Team, members of the delegations, newcomers and

managers;

38. Notes that, in 2023, the EEAS recorded over 29 623 cyber alerts via the Security Incident and Event Monitoring - SIEM, out of which 92 incidents were confirmed as cyberattacks; notes that four cyberattacks had an impact on EEAS operations and only one had significant consequences; notes that the EEAS Security Operations Centre (SOC) is a key actor in dealing with real time threat monitoring and identification of system vulnerabilities; invites the EEAS to continue to consider the need for users' cyber discipline and cyber awareness as key elements in its cyber security framework;
39. Notes that the EEAS followed up on one European Data Protection Supervisor enquiry in 2023, following a request from a member of staff concerning the publication of his/her personal data on the EU online directory; notes that a case pending since 2018 was dealt with in 2023 and closed in 2024 with a positive outcome for the EEAS; notes the awareness-raising activities and guidance issued by the EEAS to ensure a level playing field in the area of data protection across its network, notably the Joint Guide on the use of third party AI tools from the double perspective of data protection and cybersecurity;
40. Notes that the fight against foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) remained a priority for the EEAS in 2023; welcomes that the FIMI toolbox was endorsed by the European Council in December 2023 based on the pillars of situational awareness, resilience building, disruption and diplomatic responses; notes that, in 2023, the EEAS scaled up its analytical capacity to collect FIMI evidence and build responses to the increasing number of incidents and threats, in particular in the run up to the 2024 European elections; notes that the EEAS also launched new flagship projects to raise awareness and counter Russian disinformation, such as the EUvsDisinfo initiative which reached approximately 20,3 million people in 2023, and to create sustainable partnerships to counter FIMI globally;

Buildings and security

41. Notes that, in the course of 2023, the budget line 3003 on buildings and associated costs was reinforced by EUR 19 million but that important maintenance works were nevertheless deferred; is concerned that the accumulation of maintenance and security needs poses significant challenges to the EEAS with regard to how to operate the delegations' network effectively and ensure the duty of care towards delegations staff;
42. Notes that the EEAS occupies and manages real estate covering about 87 618 sqm in the EEAS headquarters and 379 300 sqm around the world with 174 office buildings and 152 residences for Ambassadors; notes that, in 2023, the EEAS presented a working document outlining its purchase policy to the budgetary authority, which currently stands at 22 % of office buildings and 20 % of residences for Ambassadors, thereby achieving the best value for money;
43. Notes that the purchase policy of real estate for Union delegations of April 2023 and the working document on the real estate policy of the EEAS for 2024 aims to achieve the most advantageous long term solution for the Union budget; highlights that none of these documents include any ideas with regard to reducing the number of delegations or creating regional hubs; urges the EEAS to keep Parliament informed of any possible

future developments in that direction;

44. Notes that, since 2020, the EEAS has been developing its office management policy towards collaborative and flexible office concepts both at the EEAS headquarters and in delegations; notes that the EEAS started to renovate the Schuman building complex, starting with the 6th and 7th floors, with a view to achieving more efficient use of office space; notes furthermore that the EEAS crisis response centre in the Schuman building was finalised in 2023; notes that, in delegations, the collaborative space concept was implemented in the new premises of 6 delegations;
45. Welcomes that the EEAS is focused on ensuring that its buildings are accessible to people with disabilities and reduced mobility; notes that the Belmont building in Brussels already fulfils the legal requirements for barrier-free buildings and that the refurbishment of the NEO building complex also accommodates the needs of users with disabilities and reduced mobility; welcomes that, for delegations, the EEAS selection procedures envisage barrier-free construction as a key selection criteria for new office buildings;

Environment and sustainability

46. Notes that, in 2023, the EEAS continued to implement the Eco-management and Audit Scheme (EMAS/EMS), notably by setting up an Environment Steering Committee and by adopting an Environmental Policy and a relevant communication strategy highlighting the EEAS commitment to environmental sustainability in real estate management; notes that the EMAS Steering Committee worked on new objectives in 2023, the aim of which is to further reduce its carbon footprint by 2030; notes that the measures approved include the reduction of the use of natural gas by 35 %, the reduction of the use of paper, water and waste production by half, an increase in the share of short to medium distance flights for missions in economic class and the better use of green public procurement;
47. Welcomes that the EEAS started to introduce sustainability clauses in the new co-location agreements, including both compulsory actions and voluntary practices; notes that, as regards the co-location agreements already in force, instead of including explicit environmental sustainability clauses, such agreements mention as an overarching principle that any co-location hosted partners adhere to procedures and practices applicable within the local context of Union office premises;
48. Notes that, in 2023, the EEAS continued to work on the implementation of a policy towards greener commuting and more sustainable travel for staff, which led to the adoption of important measures in 2024, such as the increase of the reimbursement rate for public transport subscriptions to 90 % for all staff relinquishing parking access and the objective of at least 60 % of the kilometres travelled by plane during missions should be in economy class;

Interinstitutional cooperation

49. Notes that, in 2023, the Parliament, the Council and the EEAS continued their technical

discussions regarding the replacement of the 2002 Institutional Agreement between Parliament and the Council in the field of Common Foreign and Security Policy; regrets that a single technical meeting took place in 2023 following which the Council was not able to find an agreement on the compromise solutions put forward;

50. Notes that, in 2023, the EEAS opened the negotiation process for a working arrangement with the European Public Prosecutor's Office, which was signed in 2024; notes that the working arrangement take into account the special context in which the EEAS operates, putting emphasis on the protection of information, the confidentiality of information and the protection of immunity of staff;
51. Notes that, in its 2023 budget, the EEAS earmarked EUR 990,5 million for a pilot project on launching the European Diplomatic Academy, whereby 50 junior diplomats from Member States and the Union institutions are trained on EU foreign and security policies with the aim of building a true European Diplomatic corps to promote EU foreign policy and external interest;
52. Welcomes that the EEAS scaled up its cooperation with the European Ombudsman in 2023 to improve awareness amongst its staff of the principles of good administration; notes that the new layer of cooperation involves inviting the European Ombudsman Office to present their work at the EEAS pre-posting seminars and in the EEAS annual staff seminars;

Communication

53. Notes that the EEAS has a budget allocation of EUR 22,2 million, spread over different budget lines covering publications, events, strategic communication, outreach activities and press; welcomes that standing up for democracy and the rule of law remained a priority for the EEAS, also by targeting Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference via strengthened policies and instruments;
54. Notes that, as part of its communication activities, the EEAS reaches out to the general public via public events, open days and the reception of visitors' groups; notes that, in 2023, the EEAS launched several thematic communication campaigns across different channels on the support to Ukraine, the consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the respect for Union values; notes that, in 2023, the EEAS consolidated its presence on social media and increased the number of its followers by 41,5 % on LinkedIn, by 13,8 % on Instagram, by 5,4 % on Twitter and by 4,7 % on Facebook;
55. Welcomes the involvement of the EEAS in the institutional communication campaign of Parliament for the 2024 European elections, in particular the information campaign targeting the 25 to 30 million European citizens living in third countries on the possible ways to vote in the European elections, in particular via the delegation' network; notes that this campaign reached out to 11 million recipients, via 26 video campaigns and over 2 000 posts on social media;
56. Continues to encourage Union Delegations to promote and engage with local actors, civil society organisations and social partners in third countries to stimulate social dialogue and dialogue regarding the rule of law, fundamental rights and the fight against

corruption; notes that, in 2023, under the thematic programme for civil society organisations, based on which Union partnerships are concluded with accountable and transparent organisations, EUR 50 million was allocated to the Union System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society, which monitors and promotes civic space in 86 partner countries.