



2024/2240

10.10.2024

RESOLUTION (EU) 2024/2240 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

of 11 April 2024

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 2022, Section VI – European Economic and Social Committee

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 2022, Section VI – European Economic and Social Committee,
- having regard to Rule 100 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A9-0072/2024),
- 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 Economic and Social Committee (the ‘Committee’) is an advisory body of the Union providing a forum for consultation, dialogue and consensus among representatives of the various economic, social and civil components of organised civil society from the Member States;
- C. whereas the Committee contributes to the Union decision-making process and, by ensuring links between Union policies and economic, social and civic circumstances, pursues its missions of better law making, participatory democracy from the bottom up and promotion of Union values;
- D. whereas the consultation of the Committee by the Commission or the Council is mandatory in certain cases, 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;
- E. whereas the Committee’s commission for financial and budgetary affairs is the Committee’s supervisory body for all budgetary procedures and, in particular, the establishment of the budget estimates, the budget implementation, the annual activity report, the discharge and the follow up to the annual report of the Court of Auditors (the ‘Court’);
- 1. Notes that the budget of the Committee falls under MFF Heading 7 ‘European public administration’, which amounted to a total of EUR 11,6 billion in 2022, i.e. 5,9 % of Union budget spending; notes that, in 2022, the budget of the Committee represented 1,31 % of MFF Heading 7;
- 2. Notes that the Court in its Annual Report for the financial year 2022 examined a sample of 60 transactions under Administration, the same number as were examined in 2021; further notes that the Court writes that administrative expenditure comprises expenditure on human resources including expenditure on pensions, which in 2022 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 as part of its audit for 2022, the Court examined the supervisory and control systems of the Committee, in particular the implementation of internal control standards, risk management and the functioning of key controls defined in the Financial Regulation, including *ex ante* and *ex post* controls on payments;
- 4. Notes that 14 (23 %) of the 60 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;

5. Notes with satisfaction that the Court, in its Annual Report for the financial year 2022, states that it did not identify any specific issues concerning the Committee; notes further that the Court, in its follow-up review, considered that the recommendation made to the Committee in the Annual Report for the financial year 2019 with regard to the need for the Committee to develop a sensitive functions policy in line with its internal control standards was implemented in some respects;

Budgetary and financial management

6. Notes that, in 2022, the final adopted budget for the Committee amounted to EUR 152 451 643, representing an overall increase of 5,1 % compared to 2021; notes that the remuneration and allowances budget line increased by 5 % between 2021 and 2022 due to the annual indexation of salaries; notes that the budget line for the fitting out of premises decreased by 77 % between 2021 and 2022 and came back to usual levels after the implementation of important refurbishment works in 2021; notes that, otherwise, the distribution of appropriations across budget lines in the 2022 budget remained comparable to previous years' distribution;
7. Notes that the budget implementation rate was 96,12 % in 2022, after two years of lower budgetary implementation due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the related travel restrictions; notes that the payment execution rate followed the same trend and reached 88,12 % in 2022;
8. Notes that the carry-over of appropriations to the year 2022 amounted to EUR 20 162 518, i.e. approximately 13 % of the 2022 annual budget, which was substantially higher than the average in previous years; understands that this carry-over was linked to the postponement of buildings works in 2020 and 2021;
9. Notes that the average time for payment in 2022 was 18 days, which represents a sharp decrease since 2019, when it was 30,19 days; appreciates that, at the same time, the use of electronic invoicing rose from 58,54 % in 2018 to 88,84 % in 2022 which presumably contributed to the reduction in the time for payment over that period; welcomes that the Committee changed its practices as result of internal audit recommendations on payment times which was launched and closed in 2022 and contributed to a decrease in the proportion of late payments to around 10 % in 2022;
10. Notes that the Committee's own services launched 15 negotiated procurement procedures below EUR 60 000 in 2022, mainly for expertise, studies and logistical support; noted that procurement procedures in the field of logistics were launched by the joint services that the Committee shares with the Committee of the Regions (the 'CoR');
11. Notes that, in 2022, the Committee continued to improve the cost-effectiveness of its working methods, notably thanks to hybrid work, full dematerialisation of financial circuits and reduced energy consumption; notes further that budgetary and administrative savings were achieved through interinstitutional cooperation, notably through the joint services with the CoR and the outsourcing of specific services to the Commission (for an annual fee) for the handling of HR matters and the use of various IT platforms for financial management and HR, as well as the participation in interinstitutional procurement procedures led by other institutions;
12. Is aware that the decisions pertaining to the Committee members' allowances for attending meetings and to the amount of such allowances are taken by the Council; regrets that, following the progressive lifting of travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council decided against repealing the temporary 2021 decision granting an allowance of EUR 145 for members' remote attendance of meetings, which remained in force until 25 May 2023, when a new Council decision was adopted with a flat rate of EUR 145 per day for remote attendance of meetings; considers that remote attendance is an important instrument for modern institutions given that, inter alia, it reduces the costs of meetings and allows broader participation, especially during crisis situations, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic; considers, nevertheless, that an allowance for remote attendance, despite being reduced, is difficult for the public to understand, even more so when taking into consideration the difference paid to the members of the Committee and members of the CoR for remote attendance; notes the several layers of control carried out to prove that a member is attending a meeting remotely prior to the payment of the allowance;

13. Notes that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine created budgetary pressure for the Committee, including through rising inflation and salary adjustments, strongly increasing energy costs and the cost of construction and raw materials; notes in particular that energy costs increased from EUR 726 000 to EUR 3 125 000 between 2021 and 2022, i.e. an increase of 330 %; notes that ad hoc activities in support of Ukrainian civil society incurred direct and indirect costs, such as the costs related to translation and interpretation to and from Ukrainian, the hosting of Ukrainian NGOs, and security services and trainings for missions to Ukraine;
14. Notes that the 2022 budget for staff missions increased by EUR 25 000 as compared to 2021, which was financed by a budget transfer, to cover higher expenses due to the increase in flight and hotel prices in 2022 and amounted to a total of EUR 398 974; notes that, in 2022, the President of the Committee participated in 26 missions with a total cost of EUR 38 042, compared to 12 missions with a total cost of EUR 15 327 in 2021, following the lifting of travel restrictions after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic;

Internal management, performance and internal control

15. 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 exploratory opinions, which feed into the Commission's work on its planned initiatives, and that the Committee's positions can be highlighted in resolutions or included in evaluation and information reports; notes that, in 2022, the Committee adopted 202 opinion and reports which is in line with its average annual performance, excluding 2019 and 2020 when the activity of the Committee was lower; notes that the Committee also enhanced its engagement in the political and legislative cycle by attending 345 high-level national, Union and international meetings, summits and conferences, and by organising 116 hearings and 29 conferences;
16. Appreciates the projects launched in 2022 in respect of reinforced follow-up opinions with a view to increasing the outreach and impact of selected opinions and improving the Committee's capacity to prioritise its work and in respect of the improvement of the timeliness of the delivery of the opinions of the Committee; notes that those initiatives were complemented, at the end of 2022, by a reflection on the format of opinions, the aim of which is to promote a more efficient and effective use of the Committee's opinions in the legislative decision-making process;
17. Notes that, in 2022, Members of Parliament participated in meetings or events organised by the Committee on 68 occasions, which remained at the same level as in 2021, whereas the Committee members almost doubled their participation in events organised by Parliament during the same period; welcomes that, in 2022, the Committee focused on intensifying its relations with Parliament and on promoting the Committee's added value, thus fostering even closer ties between sections of the Committee and parliamentary committees;
18. Notes the wide participation of the Committee in various initiatives, including key events and annual conferences to engage with European stakeholders; welcomes the efforts made by the Committee to enhance youth involvement in policy-making;
19. Notes that the Committee continued to reinforce its internal control framework in 2022 with the simplification of the financial circuits under the 'light verification' procedure for some low-value transactions and to develop its policy on sensitive posts, as recommended by the Court in its annual report for the 2019 financial year; notes that, based on the update of the list of sensitive posts throughout 2022 and at the time of the publication of the updated list of 36 posts at the beginning of 2023, the Committee was still working on reviewing the methodology and the risk management system, taking into account both the size of the institution and the nature of its operations; asks the Committee to inform the discharge authority of the progress made in respect of the implementation of the sensitive posts methodology in 2023;
20. Welcomes the Committee's efforts in establishing a better defined and more consistent audit framework through the finalisation of the internal audit charter and the charter of the audit committee entailing procedural rules which were approved by the audit committee in December 2022 and adopted by the Committee's bureau at the beginning of 2023; appreciates that the Committee's internal audit function was reinforced in 2022, notably with the recruitment of an administrator to its internal audit service and close coordination with the internal auditor of the CoR in all aspects relating to the audit of joint services; notes that four audits were launched in 2022 on the topics of late payments, meeting authorisations, the strategic cycle and the selection of delegates to the Committee's Consultative Commission on Industrial Change;

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

21. Notes that, at the end of 2022, the Committee had a total of 706 members of staff, compared to 699 in 2021; notes that 50 contract agents and 128 temporary agents were employed by the Committee at the end of 2022 (which represents an increase compared to 46 contract agents and 107 temporary agents in 2021), including 19 contract agents and 3 temporary agents with indefinite contract duration; notes, in addition, that the Committee employed 12 interim agents and 7 external members of staff working on-site, excluding external service providers in the fields of logistics and IT; notes that, in 2022, the occupation rate of the posts in the establishment plan was 95,1 %;
22. Welcomes the continuous efforts of the Committee to improve its HR framework with a view to becoming an attractive employer and a fully inclusive workplace where every individual is valued and can fully develop their potential; notes that the integrated HR strategy, adopted in June 2022, is articulated around the principles of inclusion, retention, competencies and performance; appreciates that one of its first follow-up actions was the launch of a staff satisfaction survey in January 2023 with a focus on staff engagement;
23. Underlines that the on-boarding of newcomers constitutes an important factor of strategic alignment by ensuring that staff are informed of the rules and strategies in place in an institution; notes that induction trainings for the Committee's newcomers resumed in April 2022; welcomes that the Committee developed a mentoring scheme where mentors were provided support and advice in the form of an exchange of best practices to adapt their methods to the hybrid working environment;
24. Notes that, with a view to better distributing its scarce resources, in 2022 the Committee commissioned an external HR mapping which confirmed the heavy workload in many different services across the Committee in light of the scarcity of resources following the reduction of the establishment plan in 2013; notes that, as a follow-up to the external audit on the HR mapping, the Committee started to prepare an action plan including actions in the scope of the HR integrated strategy, such as a review of the appraisal and performance system, the development of an internal communication strategy, the adoption of the new working conditions decision and the organisation of regular monitoring of staff engagement; calls on the Committee to provide an update on the follow-up to the HR mapping in 2023;
25. Notes with appreciation that a new decision on flexible working arrangements, enshrining a flexible and trust-based policy for hybrid working, entered into force on 1 April 2022 in the form of a pilot project, providing a wide range of part-time working patterns and flexible daily and weekly arrangements for the staff; notes that around 25 % of women and 14,4 % of men employed by the Committee applied for non-standard working patterns in 2022; notes that the decision on working conditions provides staff with the possibility to telework up to 60 % of their working time, provided that it is compatible with the interest of services, and to telework somewhere other than at the place of employment 15 days per calendar year; notes that Committee staff is provided with the necessary equipment to have good working conditions when working remotely; welcomes that the evaluation committee conducted a survey on staff satisfaction that was launched at the end of 2022; notes that the final decision on working conditions, following the social dialogue with staff unions and the Committee's staff committee and legal service, should have been adopted by the end of 2023; asks the Committee to inform the discharge authority about the developments in this regard in timely manner;
26. Regrets that, also in 2022, the Committee was not able to provide data on cases of burnout within the Committee; respects the data protection limitations, but reminds the Committee of the importance of anonymised statistical data within an organisation with the purpose of aiding managerial decisions; reiterates that awareness-raising actions, good practices in relation to workload management, communication and conflict solving, as well as return-to-work policy, should be taken into account; understands that the adoption of the new working arrangements are a positive step towards a more effective prevention of burnout at organisational level which should also take into account the findings of the results of the HR mapping;
27. Notes that, in 2022, the Committee continued to employ a high proportion of female staff (64,6 % of all staff), including at middle management level (59 % of all managers); notes that female representation at senior management position still needs to be improved, given that only three senior managers out of seven were women at the end of 2022; encourages the Committee to pursue its efforts in respect of gender balance, notably through awareness raising with respect to the appointing authority and ensuring that the composition of different bodies, including HR recruitment and selection panels, remains gender balanced;

28. Welcomes the work towards the adoption of a new diversity and inclusion policy from 2022 to 2023 in consultation with the Committee's management, the Committee's Joint Committee for Equal Opportunities and the Committee's staff committee; notes that, on top of the internal communications actions carried out, a specific awareness-raising campaign against homophobia was carried out in December 2022; welcomes that a specific training session on diversity and inclusion was made mandatory for managers and recommended for staff and that a dedicated course on diversity and inclusion was offered to the members of the Committee as part of their annual training programme; encourages the Committee to continue its discussions with Parliament with a view to joining Parliament's Positive Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities in order to recruit contract agents with disabilities; reiterates its call from the 2021 discharge for the Committee to finalise an updated diversity and inclusion strategy and action plan;
29. Notes that, while all Member States are represented among the staff of the Committee, geographical balance has still not been reached as some nationalities continue to be overrepresented compared to others; notes that in 2022 the Committee counted 21 % of managers from the 13 Member States that joined the Union after 2004, which represents a slight increase compared to 19 % in 2021; reiterates its encouragement to the Committee to continue to take action to reach a proper geographical distribution within its staff, with a particular focus on the management level;
30. Notes that, in 2022, the Committee hosted a total of 52 trainees for a five month term, four trainees for a three month term and two trainees on grants awarded by external public bodies; notes that all trainees with a five month term received a monthly grant and allowance while the shorter term trainees were not entitled to any financial contribution; welcomes that, following also the call from Parliament during the 2020 discharge procedure, a revision of the decision on the Committee's traineeship was launched in 2022 with the objective of discontinuing unpaid short-term traineeships and ensuring that all trainees receive a decent remuneration; underlines that the new decision on traineeships entered into force in July 2023, ensuring a monthly income and travel and mobility allowances and, where applicable, a disability allowance for both long-term and short-term trainees;

Ethical framework and transparency

31. Notes that the Committee continued its internal reform process with the adoption of new rules of procedures in March 2022 and their implementing provisions in November 2022; still regrets that the specific relations between a Member and an official is not tackled separately in relation to harassment; notes that the rules of procedure are now aligned and consistent with the code of conduct adopted in 2021 following the Committee's internal audit on ethics and integrity; asks the Committee to inform Parliament whether an evaluation of the implementation of the ethics and integrity audit action plan was implemented as planned and what the outcome of this evaluation was; welcomes the reflection initiated in 2022 to prepare a charter of values for the Committee's staff, following an inclusive and participatory process which was finalised and communicated to staff in 2023; believes that only a zero tolerance of harassment policy will prevent the Committee from future allegations of harassment and serious misconduct;
32. Observes that, following the entry into force of the Committee's revised decision on whistleblowing on 15 December 2021 (Decision 297/21A), as well as of the revised decision on procedures for preventing and dealing with psychological and sexual harassment at work (Decision 090/22A), adopted on 31 March 2022, the renewed ethical legal framework was expected to be completed with a revised decision laying down general implementing provisions on disciplinary procedures and administrative enquiries in 2023, in coordination with the CoR; notes that a new decision on assignments and outside activities (Decision No 141/22A) was adopted in 2022, applicable to active staff, staff on secondment and former staff, in line with the provisions of the Staff Regulations applicable at the time of leaving the service;
33. Notes with satisfaction that, in 2022, the Committee continued to train staff and raise awareness about the ethics framework in place, in particular the new code of conduct, harassment and whistleblowing, and the role and responsibilities of the ethics counsellors whose mandate started in January 2022; notes that, in 2022, 116 members of staff, including managers and newcomers, attended internal ethics training courses and 26 members of staff attended ethics training courses provided by the Commission and the European School of Administration; notes that a tailor-made training course was developed and delivered to the team of ethics counsellors; welcomes that 83 % of the respondents to the staff satisfaction survey launched in 2022 showed a strong awareness of ethical behaviour and the reinforced ethical framework of the Committee;

34. Notes, as regards the harassment cases reported in the last years' discharges, that the last settlement agreement related to the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) case OC/2018/0666/A1 was concluded on 1 October 2022, thus allowing the Committee to fully close all requests for assistance related to that case; welcomes that, on 13 April 2022, the then Committee's President made a public statement, published on the Committee's website, addressing her official apology on behalf of the Committee to all the victims, both members of staff and the former member, in the case in question; welcomes that, by its judgment of 6 October 2022 in case C-673/21 ⁽¹⁾, the Court of Justice confirmed the legality of the measures taken by the Committee's bureau in its decision of 9 June 2020;
35. Reiterates its call on the Committee for an external and independent investigation to specifically review the Committee's procedures with respect to human resources and the effectiveness thereof, with a focus on identifying the responsibilities of the administrative hierarchy in addressing harassment claims and ensuring the well-being of staff; rejects, despite the measures taken to enhance the ethical framework of the Committee in recent years, the Committee's position that such an investigation is not necessary since the measures in place allowed the harassment case to be addressed and recalls that Parliament already expressed concerns regarding the repetitive slow reaction of the Committee in the cases in question;
36. Notes that the European Ombudsman conducted three inquiries following complaints in 2022; notes that one case led to an investigation, which concluded that no maladministration had taken place; notes that two other cases were closed without investigation, the Ombudsman considering that both cases had been settled in the meantime;
37. Notes with concern that four ongoing cases of alleged harassment were still under the examination of the Committee in 2022; asks the Committee to inform Parliament about the follow-up to those cases in a timely manner; notes that there were no new cases of alleged harassment reported within the Committee, concerning either its staff or its members in 2022, but is aware that allegations of harassment involving a member of staff of the Committee were reported in another institution in 2022; asks the Committee to keep Parliament informed about the follow-up to that case in cooperation with the other institution concerned;
38. Observes that the Committee is a civil party in the ongoing legal proceedings initiated by the Belgian national authorities against a former member accused of misconduct that are currently before the Belgian court awaiting a decision; asks the Committee to inform Parliament about the developments in the case in a timely manner;
39. Notes that three cases of whistleblowing were formally opened either by members or by staff in 2022; notes that all three cases were dealt with and closed swiftly with all due respect for the protection of whistleblowers in accordance with its decision on whistleblowing (Decision 297/21A); notes further that two cases of potential whistleblowing were brought to the ethics counsellors in 2022 but neither of them were confirmed;
40. Appreciates the Committee's willingness to cooperate with the investigative bodies of the Union (OLAF and the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO)); notes that, in 2022, OLAF closed two cases of alleged misappropriation of Union funds and possible irregularities and serious misconduct concerning two members in the absence of evidence of fraud and findings; notes with concern that OLAF launched three new cases against members concerning potential fraud in 2023, two of which were closed the same year and transmitted to the EPPO for examination; notes that OLAF referred one case concerning an alleged breach of the code of conduct by a member to the Committee's ethical committee; asks the Committee to inform Parliament about the follow-up to that case in a timely manner;
41. Congratulates the Committee for taking the decision to formally join, as of 1 June 2023, the EU transparency register set up by the interinstitutional agreement of 20 May 2021 between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on a mandatory transparency register ⁽²⁾; notes that the Committee, on 21 March 2023, adopted several transparency measures in accordance with the principles laid down with respect to the EU Transparency Register, such as a recommendation for office-holding members to only meet with registered stakeholders, the obligation for office-holding members to publish their lists of meetings and a voluntary 'legislative footprint' for rapporteurs;

⁽¹⁾ Judgment of the Court of Justice of 6 October 2022, *KN v European Economic and Social Committee*, C-673/21, ECLI:EU:C:2022:759.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 207, 11.6.2021, p. 1.

42. Regrets that the Committee has a series of measures in place to prevent fraud but has not put an integrated anti-fraud strategy in place yet, despite previous requests from Parliament; welcomes that the Committee has completed an inventory on the areas which are relevant to launching an internal fraud-risk analysis, such as policies and procedures, staff training and cooperation with other bodies, with a view to improving the anti-fraud framework;

Digitalisation, cybersecurity and data protection

43. Notes that the combined IT budget of the Committee and the CoR amounted to EUR 11 712 000 in 2022, including a reinforcement of EUR 750 000 by an internal budget transfer during the year, compared to EUR 12 860 000 in 2021, i.e. a decrease of 9 %;
44. Notes that the Committee has a digital strategy aiming to provide IT services according to the best practices of IT management while optimising the use of human and financial resources; notes that the Committee worked on the adaptation and development of several strategic IT tools throughout 2022 aiming to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the political work of the Committee and of its administrative processes and workflows; notes that the main IT infrastructure project in 2022 concerned an adaptation of the network typology required for the new computer room in the Jacques Delors Building (JDE) in line with the hybrid cloud roadmap;
45. Notes that the Committee increased the amount of hybrid meetings in 2022 in order to adapt to hybrid work and optimise its ways of working, notably by reducing the number of missions; understands that this new way of working required a technical upgrade in terms of equipment for hybrid meeting rooms;
46. Notes that the Committee did not encounter any cyber-attacks in 2022; notes that the Committee and the CoR's new joint directorate for innovation and information technology is composed of three units, namely digital transformation, digital solutions and digital platforms; notes that the unit for digital platforms is responsible, *inter alia*, for cybersecurity; asks the Committee to inform the discharge authority on how the creation of this new structure contributed to enhancing the cybersecurity preparedness of its staff, in line with the NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) cybersecurity framework and in cooperation with the Cybersecurity Service for the Union's institutions, bodies and agencies (CERT-EU); encourages the Committee to raise the cybersecurity awareness of their Members and staff, to carry out regular risk assessments of its IT infrastructure and to ensure regular audits and tests of its cyber defences;
47. Notes the use by the Committee of open source technology in its own systems, notably the main operational applications used for managing the political work of the Committee (Agora and Phoenix); notes further that the Committee tracks the use of open source technologies in its annual IT portfolio so that they are applied to new applications;
48. Notes that, in 2022, the Committee was progressing towards the adoption of a new framework for document management in order to enhance transparency and accessibility; observes with interest that the Committee started to evaluate the technical feasibility and financial implications of using the Commission's Electronic Records Management System (Ares) in due course;

Buildings

49. Notes that the Committee and the CoR lost 5 000 m² in office space following the take-over of the rental contract of the former EEAS building at Belliard 100, which took effect in September 2021, and the building exchange between the Committee and the CoR's Belliard 68 and Trèves 74 and the Commission's Van Maerlant 2 (VMA), which took effect in September 2022; notes that fitting-out works in the two newly acquired buildings were necessary to enable a denser use of the office space; welcomes, in 2022, the establishment of a joint task force on new ways of working to reflect on possible optimisation of the way work is organised and how office space is used while reducing the environmental footprint;
50. Notes that the total budget committed in 2021 and 2022 to the renovation of VMA from the third to the ninth floor by the Committee and the CoR amounted to of EUR 9,54 million; notes that the renovation works undertaken by the Committee and the CoR integrated the use of smart energy saving technologies with a strong environmental component; asks the Committee to provide an update on the return on investment of these technological installations;

51. Notes that, in 2022, the building strategy of the Committee and the CoR focused on the geographical concentration of the buildings which was achieved by physically connecting all the buildings used by the Committees to their main building (JDE); welcomes the new physical connection to Parliament's buildings which became operational in November 2022, offering a more direct, easier and 125 m shorter pathway between the buildings of the Committee and the CoR and the buildings of Parliament;
52. Welcomes the commitment of the Committee and the CoR to systematically apply the 'design for all' principle to their infrastructure, ensuring accessibility of their building by design; notes that the Committee and the CoR took a range of different measures to ensure accessibility of their buildings for people with various kinds of disabilities;

Environment and sustainability

53. Welcomes the sustainable practices and notably the paperless approach of the Committee and the CoR which contributed to reducing their environmental footprint in line with the digital strategy; congratulates the Committees on having exceeded the EMAS objectives for 2021-2025, except the objectives related to gas consumption; notes that a budget of EUR 60 000 was earmarked for the Committee's carbon offsetting scheme by purchasing high quality carbon credits in 2023;
54. Notes that, in 2022, the total electricity production generated by solar panels on the buildings of the Committee and the CoR was approximately 15,5 MWh, representing 0,25 % of the total yearly consumption of the Committee and the CoR; notes that, as of 16 September 2022, only the JDE was equipped with solar panels; is aware that due to administrative procedures the Committee and the CoR will face a delay before being able to extend their solar panel installation;
55. Congratulates the Committee on establishing a business transport plan in agreement with the mobility department of the Brussels-Capital Region following which the Committee commits to carrying out a compulsory mobility survey among its staff every three years; notes that the Committee put in place a sustainable mobility plan aiming to encourage its staff to use more sustainable transport means, including through a financial contribution to the public transport subscriptions of staff or a monthly financial contribution to members of staff cycling to work; notes that the Committee is exploring additional solutions, such as the provision of electronic bikes and the installation of additional chargers for electric cars;

Interinstitutional cooperation

56. Welcomes the budgetary and administrative savings achieved through interinstitutional cooperation, in particular the close cooperation established at administrative level with the CoR with which the Committee shares premises and joint services in the areas of translation, infrastructure, logistics and IT while maintaining its full institutional autonomy; notes that, on 1 October 2022, new joint services were created, including a new directorate for innovation and information technology, a security and safety unit and a public procurement and financial management unit, as part of the new cooperation agreement signed with the CoR in 2022; notes further that 470 members of staff and EUR 55 million were pooled together by the Committee and the CoR in 2022 out of which more than EUR 30 million came from the Committee, excluding salary-related expenditure; calls on the Committee to pursue and expand that cooperation in other areas with a view to avoiding duplication and further rationalising the operating costs of services available in the premises shared by the Committee and the CoR; invites the Committee and the CoR to explore the possibility of setting up a single administration for their joint services, keeping separate directorates or units for the services dealing with matters related to their specific and independent mandates;
57. 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; notes that Parliament notably provides interpretation services for the Committee's plenaries taking place on Parliament's premises and for some meetings taking place on the Committee's premises;
58. Welcomes the Committee's strengthened involvement in the legislative cycle and calls on the Committee to ensure that its opinions are shared with the members of the relevant committees of Parliament in line with the cooperation agreement between Parliament and the Committee;

59. Notes that the Committee pursued and intensified its cooperation with the Commission in 2022 in the context of the service-level agreement with the Commission's investigation and disciplinary office on administrative enquiries support and in the framework of the cooperation protocol updated in 2022, reinforcing the political, legislative and communication synergies between those two institutions, in particular in the implementation of the European Citizens' initiative and the European Semester; notes that, according to the updated cooperation protocol, the use of the Committee's exploratory opinions by the Commission was reinforced, thus strengthening the Committee's involvement in the Union legislative cycle;
60. Notes that the Committee plays a pivotal role in reinforcing the links with and between the national economic and social councils of the Member States; encourages the Committee to continue fostering the cooperation on topics of common interest and on good practices and highlighting how civil society brings its contribution to the current challenges of the Union, notably through staff exchange and the organisation of common events;

Communication

61. Notes that, in 2022, the Committee's overall budget for communication was EUR 1,5 million, the same amount as in 2021; notes that this budget was primarily allocated to support the development and maintenance of the Committee's website, social media communication, media monitoring, media relations and promotion of major activities and events of the Committee, such as the Civil Society Prize and the activities related to the Committee in the works of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE) and the Committee's support for Ukraine;
62. Welcomes the adoption by the Committee of a new data driven communication strategy in October 2022, aiming to increase the outreach of the Committee's communication and the impact of its opinions and defining European Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the other Union institutions as its main communication targets; notes further that, in 2022, the Committee updated the rules on partnership with the aim of enhancing its strategic engagement with CSOs through thematic events;
63. Notes that the Committee organised major hybrid events on topical issues of relevance for civil society, such as the CoFE high-level event on 'Shaping Europe together - the future is in your hands', the annual youth event 'Your Europe your say' for pupils and teachers of the Union and candidate countries, and the annual youth plenary session 'The Truth about Lies. Youth challenging Disinformation' for students; notes that the Committee also organised more specialised activities focusing on the Year of Youth and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, addressed to journalists and communication professionals of CSOs;
64. Welcomes that the overall reach of the Committee's communication increased in 2022 compared to 2021, notably through media coverage and web and social media presence; notes that the number of visits to the central Facebook page increased by 96,9 % (57 000 visits) and the number of visits to the Instagram account increased by 97,9 % (20 000 visits) while the number of Facebook users increased by 1,1 % (6 million users), the outreach on Instagram increased by 33 % (over 3 million users), the posts published on LinkedIn generated almost 1,2 million impressions, and the tweets published on X (formerly Twitter) gathered over 6 million impressions; welcomes the Committee's participation, as of 2023, in the pilot project led by the European Data Protection Supervisor aimed at bringing Union institutions on EU-Voice and EU-Video, which are two free, open-source social media networks, based on Mastodon software, allowing Union institutions to interact with the public by sharing texts, images, videos and podcasts;
65. Welcomes that the Committee ensures that citizens have open access to its documents via a dedicated electronic register; notes that the Committee contributes to the open data portal of the Commission with its own datasets, thus endorsing greater transparency in its operations through freely accessible data in human and machine-readable formats and strengthening the link with citizens.