



2025/1611

8.10.2025

RESOLUTION (EU) 2025/1611 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

of 7 May 2025

**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**

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 (A10-0069/2025),
- 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 Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy ('Vice-President/High Representative') 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 with concern 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; urges the EEAS to pay its commitments on time; urges 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 3 0 0 3 on buildings and associate costs in delegations by EUR 18,97 million and budget lines 3 0 0 1 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 faced 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; acknowledges the EEAS's role in gathering evidence against EU-sanctioned Russian state-backed outlets and individuals involved in spreading disinformation and manipulating information to justify Russia's war of aggression; underlines the need to provide adequate resources to the Strategic Communication and Foresight division of the EEAS to effectively combat disinformation campaigns deployed as strategic tools by authoritarian and illiberal regimes; calls on the EEAS to reinforce the Union delegations in the Eastern Partnership countries to support those countries heavily affected by Russia's military aggression against Ukraine; notes that the financial ceiling of the European Peace Facility managed under the authority of the Vice-President/High Representative was increased from EUR 5,6 million to more than EUR 12 million in 2023; calls on the EEAS to collaborate with the Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood to ensure effective oversight and monitoring of the projects funded by the Facility; 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; emphasises that Union and EEAS assistance must align with broader human rights and peace objectives in the region, with strong safeguards in place to ensure that the funds do not, either directly or indirectly, support terrorist or violent activities; emphasises that Union funding for the reconstruction of Gaza should only commence once all hostages taken by Hamas have been released; emphasises the importance of transparency in the allocation of financial resources in third countries to ensure accountability in the use of the Union budget and the new financial instruments;
9. Urges the EEAS to work closely with the Commission to ensure that the complete restitution of the Romanian National Treasure, along with the national heritage of other Member States, is on the agenda of any potential future actions regarding the Russian Federation;
10. Recalls that there have been allegations regarding the involvement of UNRWA employees in Gaza in the terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israel on 7 October 2023; notes that in response to these allegations, nine staff members had their employment formally terminated by the UNRWA; underlines that the Commission has been working with the UNRWA to improve control systems, in line with recommendations from the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), including the screening of staff and the strengthening of internal investigative and ethical frameworks; stresses that following the concerns repeatedly raised by Parliament regarding the misuse of Union

funding, any Union aid should not under any circumstances be financing terrorism; urges continued vigilance in ensuring that the taxpayer money is not misused; stresses the importance of controls to ensure compliance with Union rules and international law by beneficiaries of Union funds, as well as the need for enhanced measures to prevent misuse of Union financial support; encourages the EEAS to reinforce efforts to safeguard Union funding, and to monitor the implementation of the milestones outlined in the agreement between Commissioner Várhelyi and the UNRWA Commissioner General Lazzarini in April 2024, which includes provisions for conducting Union audits and reinforcing internal oversight at the UNRWA; underlines the need for the Palestinian Authority to align all educational materials with Unesco standards, particularly removing any content that includes antisemitism or incitement to violence; stresses that Union financial support for the Palestinian Authority in the area of education should be provided on the condition that these standards are met; encourages the EEAS to support diplomatic efforts for a comprehensive and sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to keep Parliament informed about any developments in Union cooperation with the Palestinian Authority;

11. 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; regrets 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; emphasises the necessity of establishing an EU diplomatic service;
12. 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 third countries; requests the EEAS to investigate the reasons behind the relatively high number of failed procurement procedures and to propose solutions to ensure their effective implementation while maintaining the standards set by the Union; regrets that, for external actions, procurement rules have been simplified in the recast of the Financial Regulation; underlines that procurement rules are intended to ensure that funded projects maintain high standards and are not prone to fraud; calls on the EEAS to always strive for the highest possible level of scrutiny in any tender process; believes that a lack of familiarity in third countries with the high standards of Union procurement rules should never be a pretext or excuse to lower the bar;
13. 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;
14. 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; regrets that the EEAS does not have a separate budget line for missions and travel for the Vice-President/High Representative and that the missions and travel costs for the Vice-President/High Representative 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 Vice-President/High Representative and air-taxi costs of EUR 288 145, corresponding to a decrease of 51 % compared to 2022 when air-taxi costs were EUR 588 103; underlines that the leaders of the Union's institutions should act as good examples to the public and citizens, especially when using Union resources in the performance of their duties; stresses that the flight options should be chosen on the basis of sound financial management criteria, provided that such alternatives are available and in line with the agenda and venue of meetings; stresses that transparency and sound financial management in using the Union's public funds must remain a core principle for all Union institutions;

15. Underlines the negative impact cuts may have on the implementation of the external affairs instruments, such as Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI – Global Europe) and Global Gateway; underlines the need to provide adequate resources to the Strategic Communication and Foresight division of the EEAS to continue to effectively combat disinformation campaigns deployed as strategic tools by authoritarian and illiberal regimes; welcomes in this regard the announcement of the creation of the Task Force for Strategic Communication and Countering Information Manipulation in the Directorate-General for Communication of the Commission;
16. Insists on the budgetary increase for Common Foreign Security Policy (CFSP) actions and other appropriate peace, conflict and crisis response instruments, as well as IT and security protocols, in order to fully match the Union's activities and capabilities with current challenges and conflicts worldwide;

Internal management, performance and internal control

17. 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; welcomes 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;
18. 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;
19. 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 with great concern 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 2025-2027 multiannual strategic internal audit plan; stresses the importance of conducting internal audits diligently and regularly; deeply regrets that 4 critical and 49 very important audit recommendations related to finalised audits remained open in 2023; requests that the Parliament be informed on the implementation of the recommendations;
20. 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; calls on the EEAS to fully implement the Court's report recommendations to address identified weaknesses in information management, both within its headquarters and Union delegations in non-EU countries, as well as within the Vice-President/High Representative's private office; asks that Parliament be kept informed on the follow-up of the Court's recommendations;
21. 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;
22. Notes that, in 2023, three Union delegations (Central African Republic, Sierra Leone, and Syria) submitted reservations in their Declarations of Assurance, primarily concerning operational budget lines managed by the Commission; highlights that these reservations did not have a substantial financial impact on the administrative budget under the responsibility of the EEAS;

23. Calls on the EEAS and on the Commission to closely collaborate with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Washington, D.C., and the Union delegation in the United States to identify, fund, and implement initiatives aimed at strengthening the Transatlantic Relationship, including exchange programs for professionals working in public institutions in both the EU and the U.S.;
24. Calls on the EEAS and Union delegations to intensify monitoring of the state of democracy in various countries and to enhance logistical and technological support for human rights defenders and indigenous individuals, with a particular focus on women;
25. Recalls that it is crucial to further strengthen our support to human rights, democracy and development in third countries through the NDICI – Global Europe, as a world of democracies is a safer world; underlines that resources to the EU's Digital Diplomacy should be further increased given the current context of rapid technological advancements and geopolitical competition; insists that 'green diplomacy' and the green transition, as one of the Union's priorities, should be enhanced towards third countries through the Union's External Action; emphasises the need for EEAS to play a central role in promoting peace and stability in the Middle East, to increase funding to ensure humanitarian aid in Lebanon, Gaza, and Syria, and to strengthen human rights monitoring; highlights financial support for the EEAS delegations deployed in the Middle East, Gulf countries, and Africa to ensure they can continue implementing the Union's External Action in the region;
26. Notes that the Special Report 14/2023 of the Court found deficiencies in the methodologies used by the Commission and the EEAS for allocating funding to partner countries and in the setup of the monitoring framework and recommended that the Commission and the EEAS notably improve the methodology for allocating funding and the assessment of the impact of Union support, focus the scope of the programming process and simplify and consistently use the indicators in the multiannual indicative programmes;
27. Welcomes the appointment of the first EU Special Representative for the Gulf region;
28. Highlights that recent events, notably Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and its hostile attempts to influence democratic processes in Europe as well as growing instability in the Middle East, have brought Union foreign policy and its implementation to the forefront of concerns among the Member States and institutions; underlines the central role played by the EEAS and its delegations in conducting the Union's external policy and in fighting foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI); stresses the importance of the EEAS for the Union's relations with the 25 to 30 million Union citizens living outside the Union; acknowledges that the EEAS budget, already structurally underfunded, was disproportionately affected in comparison to other Union institutions by the higher inflation rates and subsequent energy crisis caused by Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, and is concerned of these negative consequences for the EEAS and the performance of the Union institutions and the lack of action to rectify the current budgetary situation that can severely impact the Union's relations with third countries;
29. Welcomes the steadfast support provided to Ukraine, including through the civilian EU Advisory Mission (EUAM Ukraine) and the training of Ukrainian soldiers under the EU Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM);
30. Underlines that the Union must increase funding to reinforce the dedicated budget line within the Union's foreign policy actions specifically for gender equality and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, in order to ensure consistent financing for initiatives that promote gender-responsive leadership, protect women's rights, and combat sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in conflict and post-conflict settings; stresses that such funding is essential to support local civil society organisations, provide survivor-centred support, and integrate gender perspectives into Union diplomatic and security efforts;
31. Stresses that the Gender Action Plan (GAP) III dictates that 85 % of new Union actions must contribute to gender equality and women and girls' empowerment; calls on the EEAS to accelerate the progress towards the goals of GAP III by meaningfully focusing in its every day work on the GAP III's key areas of engagement, including ending gender-based violence, promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic and social rights and empowerment, equal participation and leadership; notes that GAP III will expire in 2027 and urges the EEAS, to this end, to develop a more ambitious GAP IV that will ensure a stronger connection between women's rights and empowerment and the Union's foreign and security policy, ready for implementation as of 2028;
32. Underlines the extremely vulnerable situation of children in the world, specifically in armed conflict; expresses serious concern about the tens of thousands of children that were affected by armed conflict across the globe and suffered abhorrent abuses and violations of their most basic rights in 2023; calls on the EEAS to put children's rights at the centre of their efforts;

33. Recalls the dire situation of women's rights and LGBTIQ+ rights in many parts of the world; stresses the urgent need to better protect these rights; highlights the central role of the EEAS in advancing human rights around the world; calls on the EEAS to enhance their efforts in this regard;
34. Sees election observation mission as a practical and effective foreign policy instrument that remains central to the Union's democracy support policies and strategies; calls on the Union to ensure adequate resources to the EU election observation missions, in view also of extending them to elections in candidate and neighbouring countries;

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

35. 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;
36. 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;
37. 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;
38. Notes that, by the end of 2023, the EEAS statutory population comprised 52,7 % men and 47,3 % women, reflecting a slight increase in female representation compared to 2022, when 46,8 % of staff were women; welcomes the modest progress in gender balance within senior management, where the representation of women increased from 6,3 % in 2022 to 7,6 % in 2023, and in middle management, where it rose from 30,1 % in 2022 to 30,4 % in 2023; calls on the EEAS to intensify efforts to achieve a more substantial and visible gender balance across all levels of the organisation;
39. Welcomes the publication of the mid-term report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III) by the Vice-President/High Representative and the Commission at the end of 2023, as well as the decision to extend its timeline to 2027 to align with the multiannual financial framework (MFF); acknowledges GAP III's significance in promoting gender equality as a strategic priority in Union's external action and enhancing its role in this area; welcomes the organisation of the first executive trainings on Gender-Responsive Leadership (GRL) for senior managers in late 2023 by the team of the Ambassador for Gender and Diversity;
40. Welcomes the first EEAS report on FIMI activities targeting LGBTIQA+ individuals, aimed at enhancing understanding of FIMI tactics and fostering cooperation, including with ENISA, to protect the LGBTIQA+ community; expresses concern about the global status of LGBTIQ+ rights and the increasing resistance to gender equality, women's rights, and sexual and reproductive health and rights in developing countries; calls on the Commission and the EEAS to address these setbacks and prioritise targeted support for civil society organisations advocating for these rights;
41. Notes that, in its decision adopted in July 2023, the Vice-President/High Representative 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;

42. Notes that at the end of 2023, out of 1 695 officials and temporary agents, 863 (51 %) were men and 832 (49 %) were women, which represents a slight increase from 2022; notes that among contract agents 57,4 % were women, which is a slight increase from 2022; however regrets that women are still notably underrepresented in senior positions, both in headquarters and in delegations, and overrepresented mainly in AST positions; calls on the EEAS to publish a gender and nationality breakdown of middle and senior management positions; asks the EEAS to address this issue, while at the same time respecting the competences and merits of the candidates; welcomes that the 2023 rotation exercise offered 42 management posts in delegations and resulted in a 12 % increase in the number of women Ambassadors, whereas in 2023 35,50 % of them were women (up from 31,70 %), which, nevertheless, is still an underrepresentation;
43. Observes that although all Member States are represented in the EEAS staff, significant imbalances persist with Belgium being the most overrepresented Member State making up 12,1 % of total staff employed by the EEAS; points out that a significant geographical imbalance is also concentrated between Western and Eastern Member States; 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; strongly reiterates its call on the EEAS to continue to ensure a sound geographical balance throughout its organisation and on all levels; also reiterates its concern about gender balance; notes that women are notably under-represented in senior positions, while in AST positions in particular, they are overrepresented; calls on the EEAS to publish a gender and nationality breakdown of middle and senior management positions; asks the EEAS to address this issue, while at the same time respecting the competences and merits of the candidates;
44. 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;
45. Notes with satisfaction 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'; calls on the EEAS to continue to regularly train managerial and non-managerial staff on issues regarding diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging;
46. 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; acknowledges the efforts made by the EEAS to strengthen its anti-harassment policies, including the introduction of mandatory e-learning modules to raise awareness and the establishment of an 'Istanbul Convention Task Force' aimed at identifying measures to ensure a safer workplace for all; however, expresses serious concern about the persistently high number of harassment cases; calls on the EEAS to implement stronger prevention, victim support, strict disciplinary measures to ensure zero tolerance for harassment and a safe working environment;
47. 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;

48. 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; stresses the need for managers to ensure fair task allocation and implement guidance and flexible working arrangements; calls on the EEAS to take a proactive approach to prevent long-term sickness and burnout, prioritising the mental wellbeing of its staff through effective support measures;
49. Takes note that because of budgetary constraints the number of trainees employed was reduced; calls on the EEAS to provide information on the working conditions and remuneration of trainees in the HQ and delegations;

Ethical framework and transparency

50. 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; calls on the EEAS to provide regular mandatory trainings on ethics, including ethical usage of AI, and accountability;
51. 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; welcomes 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; asks the EEAS to conduct mandatory regular fraud awareness and prevention trainings for all staff;
52. Notes that the EEAS did not receive any whistleblowing cases in 2023; notes with satisfaction 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;
53. 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;
54. 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; asks that the Parliament is kept informed on the implementation of the recommendations;
55. 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;

56. Takes note of all activities undertaken to raise awareness on outside activities; reminds the Parliament's request to adopt self-standing implementation provisions on outside activities and assignments, in order to protect the image and reputation of the Union in particular in case of Heads of Delegations;
57. Notes that, in his/her capacity as Vice-President of the Commission, the Vice-President/High Representative 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, notify them to the management board of the Transparency Register and join the 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; reiterates the importance of further strengthening the democratic scrutiny of the Union and of upholding high standards of accountability and transparency when engaging with civil society organisations; asks Union delegations to ensure that Union funds awarded to civil society organisations and social partners in third countries are used in line with the Union values, policies, and financial rules;
58. Urges the EEAS to join the EU Transparency Register to align its practices with Parliament and the Commission, ensuring full disclosure of lobbying activities and financial interests related to defense and diplomatic matters;

Digitalisation, cybersecurity and data protection

59. 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;
60. 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; asks that the Parliament be kept informed of the development of the AI Strategy;
61. Notes that, as 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; asks that the EEAS provides regular mandatory cybersecurity training to all staff; calls further for enhanced Union support for Moldova in combating disinformation, hybrid threats, and cyberattacks; calls on the Union delegation to Moldova to enhance its efforts to promote a more proactive and effective communication strategy regarding the European perspective, including outreach in the Russian language;
62. Welcomes the establishment of EU Partnership Mission in Moldova (EUPM Moldova); highlights the essential role of the EUPM Moldova and calls the EU and its Member States to extend the mission's mandate beyond May 2025 while increasing resources to enhance its effectiveness;
63. Notes with concern 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; warns that the EEAS is a highly likely target for well-resourced actors, including those sponsored by foreign states, seeking to disrupt Union Institutions; notes that the EEAS Security Operations Centre (SOC) is a key actor in dealing with real time threat monitoring and identification of system vulnerabilities; requests the EEAS to continue to consider the need for users' cyber discipline and cyber awareness as key elements in its cyber security framework; emphasises the importance of the EEAS continuing to prioritise cybersecurity and hybrid threat mitigation while collaborating closely with other Union Institutions and Member States to identify and counter such threats;

64. 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;
65. Notes that the fight against 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; calls on the EEAS, together with the Commission to dedicate adequate resources to effectively combat FIMI; supports the pledged establishment of a 'European Democracy Shield' to detect, track and delete deceitful online content, hereby strengthening the Union's ability to counter FIMI and enhancing its support for protecting democracies in third countries, especially within the Union's neighbourhood; calls on the EEAS and Union delegations in third countries to further strengthen their respective capacities in fighting and countering disinformation and propaganda linked to the Union's CFSP and; calls on the EEAS to scale up its efforts to empower citizens from across the Union to fight against foreign information manipulation and interference;

Buildings and security

66. Notes that, in the course of 2023, the budget line 3 0 0 3 on buildings and associated costs was reinforced by EUR 19 million but that important maintenance works were nevertheless deferred; is deeply concerned that the accumulation of maintenance and security needs poses significant challenges to the EEAS with regard to how to operate the delegations' network safely and effectively, and ensure the duty of care towards delegations staff; requests the EEAS to develop multi-annual contingency plans for buildings maintenance and security;
67. 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;
68. 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;
69. Invites the EEAS to maintain its important network of delegations around the world with sufficient staff in order to improve its ability to reach out to third countries;
70. Notes with concern that these budgetary constraints could lead to excessive closures of EU embassies and postponing security installations in a number of Union delegations hampering the EEAS' ability to fulfil its mandate and defend Union values and properly ensure the duty of care to all staff in delegations; urges the Members States to provide enough financing to the EEAS and the Commission to ensure that the Union maintains its network of delegations untouched as a signal of its global engagement;
71. 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;

72. 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

73. Welcomes 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;
74. 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;
75. 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;
76. Stresses the importance of strong political engagement, bilateral leverage, public and cultural diplomacy to promote Union values and combat disinformation; emphasises the need for a robust and resilient external service with clear political leadership to address current challenges and ensure coherence in the Union's foreign policy; urges Union delegations to strengthen support for genuine democratic actors and civil society in the Western Balkans, while firmly and publicly condemning actions by illiberal and undemocratic actors that undermine the Union's interests, and to ensure that IPA III funding is implemented in line with the Union's objectives; calls on the Union delegations in the region to apply a more credible and merit-based approach based on the Copenhagen criteria, notably on the rule of law, democracy and the protection of human rights, especially given the limited progress made by some countries in the Western Balkans;
77. Welcomes the EEAS's excellent cooperation with bodies such as OLAF, the EPPO, the Court, and the EDPS, reflected in regular meetings and exchanges of information; notes the conclusion of dedicated working arrangements in June 2024; calls nevertheless on the EEAS to institutionalise structured cooperation with those bodies, ensuring systematic fraud detection mechanisms for the Union's external action funding, particularly in high-risk conflict zones and fragile states;

Interinstitutional cooperation

78. 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;
79. 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;
80. Notes that, in its 2023 budget, the EEAS earmarked EUR 990,5 million for a pilot project to launch the European Diplomatic Academy, whereby 50 junior diplomats from Member States and the Union institutions are trained on Union foreign and security policies with the aim of building a true European Diplomatic corps to promote Union foreign policy and external interest; encourages this initiative as a step towards fostering a cohesive and well-trained European diplomatic corps that can effectively represent and defend the Union's values and interests on the global stage; underlines the necessity to improve the visibility of the European Diplomatic Academy across all Member States and to strengthen its role and capacities;

81. 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

82. 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;
83. Points to the rise in the number of violations of freedom of religion worldwide; calls on the EEAS to adequately equip its staff in view of this in countries where there is no religious freedom or where religious freedom is under pressure (including by means of training courses); with a view to entering into discussions on this topic with the relevant authorities at all levels in countries where freedom of religion is being violated; and make this a key focus of its external action;
84. 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; welcomes that Ukraine remained a top priority for the EEAS; 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; urges the EEAS to enhance its communication of Union policies to citizens in third countries and to strengthen coordination efforts aimed at increasing the visibility of Union-funded projects, particularly in candidate countries, in order to counter the attempts of malicious actors to undermine the Union's efforts;
85. 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;
86. Highlights the EEAS's contribution to the Union's overarching efforts to demonstrate steadfast support for Ukraine with initiatives like the #StandWithUkraine campaign and targeted communication projects such as Faces of Ukraine, Art vs War, and Share Your Light;
87. 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.