

Discharge for the 2015 budget – Council and European Council

During the October II plenary session, the European Parliament is due to bring to a close the discharge procedure for the Council's financial accounts for the year 2015, by voting on the second report of the Committee on Budgetary Control. For several years in a row now, the Parliament has refused to grant discharge to the Council and the European Council.

The discharge procedure

The [discharge procedure](#) is an *ex-post* control of spending under the EU's budget. At institutional level, it is up to the European Parliament (EP) to grant, postpone or reject discharge to different bodies. The EP acts on the recommendation of the Council, taking as a basis the annual report of the European Court of Auditors. The discharge procedure concerns the European Commission (including the executive agencies), other institutions (including EP, Council and European Council), decentralised agencies and joint undertakings. A separate discharge is granted to the European Development Fund, since formally speaking it sits outside the EU budget.

Discharge to the Council

The EP grants discharge individually to all institutions as managers of their own administrative budgets. And since 2003, the EP has prepared a separate discharge decision for the Council (since 2011 for Council and European Council). However, the Council considers that the rules allow the EP to grant discharge only to the Commission, being responsible for the entire budget. Since 2009, the EP has declined to grant discharge to the Council because of its lack of cooperation in the provision of information. While the procedure for 2015 has continued under the present system, the Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) established a working group in March 2017, to draft a proposal on the Council discharge procedure and find a way forward.

European Parliament position

After the [decision](#) taken by the EP on 27 April 2017 to postpone discharge for the 2015 financial year, CONT adopted on 25 September 2017 its second [report](#), in which it proposes to refuse to grant discharge to the Council and the European Council for that financial year. CONT Members welcome the fact that, for the first time, the Council has provided the EP with the 2015 annual activity reports of the Council's Directorate-General for Administration, the Legal Service, and the Directorate-General for Communication and Document Management. However, they regret that the Council has not responded to the remarks made by the EP in its discharge [resolution](#) adopted earlier this year.

Among pending issues, the second report reiterates that, contrary to EP recommendations, the budgets of the European Council and the Council have not yet been separated. CONT Members also ask for progress reports on building projects and for a detailed breakdown of the costs, especially in relation to the delayed completion of the Europa building. They call on the Council to develop detailed anti-corruption guidelines and independent policies within its structures. CONT Members insist on cooperation between Parliament and Council in order to exercise effective budgetary control. They repeat the Commission's view that all institutions should be part of the process of following up the observations made by Parliament in the discharge exercise, and insist that the Council's expenditure must be scrutinised in the same way as that of other institutions.

[Discharge 2015 – General budget of the EU: Council and European Council](#), 2016/2153(DEC). Committee responsible: CONT; Rapporteur: Bart Staes (Greens/EFA, Belgium).

