



**2024/2024(DEC)**

31.1.2025

# **OPINION**

of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

for the Committee on Budgetary Control

on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2023, Section X - European External Action Service  
(2024/2024(DEC))

Rapporteur for opinion: Michael Gahler

PA\_NonLegDec

## OPINION

The Committee on Foreign Affairs calls on the Committee on Budgetary Control, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following into its motion for a resolution:

1. Highlights that recent events, notably Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the former's hostile attempts to influence democratic processes in Europe as well as growing instability in the Middle East, have brought EU foreign policy and its implementation to the forefront of concerns among the EU Member States and institutions; underlines the central role played by the European External Action Service (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 EU's relations with the 25 to 30 million EU citizens living outside the Union; acknowledges that the EEAS budget, already structurally underfunded, was disproportionately affected in comparison to other EU 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 EU institutions and the lack of action to rectify the current budgetary situation that can severely impact the EU's relations with third countries;
2. Emphasises the need for the European External Action Service (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.
3. Highlight financial support for the European External Action Service (EEAS) delegations deployed in the Middle East, Gulf countries, and Africa to ensure they can continue implementing the EU's External Action in the region.
4. Insists on the budgetary increase for CFSP actions and other appropriate peace, conflict and crisis response instruments, as well as IT and security protocols, in order to fully match EU's activities and capabilities with current challenges and conflicts worldwide;
5. Highlights the EEAS's contribution to the EU'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;
6. Reminds that it is crucial to further strengthening 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 EU's priorities, should be enhanced towards third countries through the EU's External Action;
7. 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;

8. Regrets that the European Court of Auditors in its Annual Report for the financial year 2023 observes that they found quantifiable error in one of the 13 payments examined, concerning the absence of a valid procurement procedure and six non-quantifiable findings concerning procurement at EU Delegations, including weaknesses in the methodology for selecting tenderers and evaluating tenders, as well as entering into a legal commitment before making the budgetary commitment;
9. Notes that the Special Report 14/2023 of the European Court of Auditors 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 EU support, focus the scope of the programming process and simplify and consistently use the indicators in the multiannual indicative programmes.
10. Welcomes the Court of Auditors' Special Report regarding the coordination role of the EEAS and its conclusions that coordination is mostly effective, allowing the service to properly support the High Representative/Vice-President to deliver their mandate; notes that nevertheless some weaknesses in information management, staffing and reporting remain; calls on the EEAS to prioritise the implementation of the recommendations of the Special Report by the deadline in 2025 as timely action is important in reinforcing its operational capacity and enhancing its contribution to the EU foreign policy objectives.
11. Notes that the EEAS is committed to make itself more cost-effective while continuing to face significant budgetary constraints in 2023 despite increasing geopolitical challenges; acknowledges that the EEAS has substantially cut its mission and representation budget, which impacts the core functions of a Diplomatic service, and has reduced non-compulsory expenditure and freezing and postponing building maintenance, infrastructure and IT projects; notes with concern that these budgetary constraints could lead to excessive closures of EU embassies and postponing security installations in a number of EU Delegations hampering the EEAS' ability to fulfil its mandate and defend EU values and properly ensure the duty of care to all staff in Delegations; urges the Member States to provide enough financing to the EEAS and the Commission to ensure that the EU maintains its network of Delegations untouched as a signal of its global engagement; underlines the negative impact cuts may have on the implementation of the external affairs instruments, such as NDICI and Global Gateway; underlines the need to provide adequate resources to the Strategic Communication and Foresight division of the European External Action Service (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 DG COMM of the Commission;
12. 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);
13. Welcomes the appointment of the first EU Special Representative for the Gulf region;

14. Underlines that the EU must increase funding to reinforce the dedicated budget line within EU 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-centered support, and integrate gender perspectives into EU diplomatic and security efforts.
15. Stresses that the Gender Action Plan (GAP) III dictates that 85% of new EU 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 EU's foreign and security policy, ready for implementation as of 2028;
16. 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;
17. Continues to encourage the EEAS and Union delegations to promote and engage with local actors and civil society organisations in third countries to stimulate dialogue about the rule of law, fundamental human rights and the fight against corruption and the misuse of EU funds;
18. Calls on the EU Delegations to enhance support to genuine democratic actors and civil society in the Western Balkans, go strongly and publicly denounce actions by illiberal and undemocratic actors that go against the Union's interest and to ensure that the implementation of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) III funding is in line with the EU's objectives; calls on the EU 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;
19. Calls for enhanced EU support for Moldova in combating disinformation, hybrid threats, and cyberattacks; calls the EU 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;
20. Recalls the dire situation of women's rights and LGBTIQI+ 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;

21. Sees electoral observation mission as a practical and effective foreign policy instrument that remains central to the EU's democracy support policies and strategies; calls on the EU to ensure adequate resources to the EU electoral observation missions, in view also of extending them to elections in candidate and neighbouring countries.
22. 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;
23. Urges the EEAS and the EU Delegations to closely monitor the state of democracy in the different countries and to provide logistical and technological support to human rights defenders and indigenous persons, in particular women;
24. Emphasises that freedom of religion and belief is a fundamental value of the free world and the European Union; urges the European External Action Service to incorporate faith diplomacy into its actions, recognising religion as a part of the solution to global challenges; underlines that this approach should include actively safeguarding the rights of Christians and other religious groups especially in countries where they are a minority, as well as promoting tolerance, and ensuring that religious freedom is part of all relevant external engagements and policies of the EU;

**ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS  
FROM WHOM THE RAPPOREUR FOR THE OPINION HAS RECEIVED INPUT**

The rapporteur for opinion declares under his exclusive responsibility that he did not receive input from any entity or person to be mentioned in this Annex pursuant to Article 8 of Annex I to the Rules of Procedure.

## INFORMATION ON ADOPTION BY COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

<b>Date adopted</b>	30.1.2025
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 53 -: 19 0: 2
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Mika Aaltola, Lucia Annunziata, Petras Auštrevičius, Jordan Bardella, Dan Barna, Wouter Beke, Robert Biedroń, Ioan-Rareș Bogdan, Marc Botenga, Grzegorz Braun, Sebastião Bugalho, Danilo Della Valle, Özlem Demirel, Elio Di Rupo, Michael Gahler, Geadis Geadí, Giorgos Georgiou, Raphaël Glucksmann, Bernard Guetta, Rima Hassan, Rasa Juknevičienė, Sandra Kalniete, Łukasz Kohut, Rihards Kols, Andrey Kovatchev, Vilis Krištopans, Nathalie Loiseau, Claudiu Manda, David McAllister, Vangelis Meimarakis, Sven Mikser, Francisco José Millán Mon, Arkadiusz Mularczyk, Leoluca Orlando, Kostas Papadakis, Tonino Picula, Thijs Reuten, Nacho Sánchez Amor, Andreas Schieder, Alexander Sell, Villy Søvndal, Davor Ivo Stier, Sebastiaan Stöteler, Stanislav Stoyanov, Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, Michał Szczerba, António Tânger Corrêa, Marta Temido, Cristian Terheș, Riho Terras, Hermann Tertsch, Pierre-Romain Thionnet, Sebastian Tynkkynen, Reinier Van Lanschot, Roberto Vannacci, Hilde Vautmans, Harald Vilimsky, Željana Zovko
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Jaume Asens Llodrà, Malik Azmani, Engin Eroglu, Sandra Gómez López, Evin Incir, András László, Ana Catarina Mendes, Hans Neuhoff, Nicolás Pascual de la Parte, Chloé Ridet, Tineke Strik, Șerban Dimitrie Sturdza, Ingeborg Ter Laak, Matej Tonin, Ivaylo Valchev, Isabel Wiseler-Lima
<b>Members under Rule 216(7) present for the final vote</b>	Catarina Vieira



## FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

53	+
ECR	Rihards Kols, Arkadiusz Mularczyk, Cristian Terheş, Sebastian Tynkkynen, Ivaylo Valchev
PPE	Mika Aaltola, Wouter Beke, Ioan-Rareş Bogdan, Sebastião Bugalho, Michael Gahler, Rasa Juknevičienė, Sandra Kalniete, Łukasz Kohut, Andrey Kovatchev, David McAllister, Vangelis Meimarakis, Francisco José Millán Mon, Nicolás Pascual de la Parte, Davor Ivo Stier, Ingeborg Ter Laak, Riho Terras, Matej Tonin, Isabel Wiseler-Lima, Željana Zovko
Renew	Petras Auštrevičius, Malik Azmani, Dan Barna, Engin Eroglu, Bernard Guetta, Nathalie Loiseau, Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, Hilde Vautmans
S&D	Lucia Annunziata, Robert Biedroń, Elio Di Rupo, Raphaël Glucksmann, Sandra Gómez López, Evin Incir, Claudiu Manda, Ana Catarina Mendes, Sven Mikser, Tonino Picula, Thijs Reuten, Chloé Ridet, Nacho Sánchez Amor, Andreas Schieder, Marta Temido
Verts/ALE	Jaume Asens Llodrà, Leoluca Orlando, Villy Søvndal, Tineke Strik, Reinier Van Lanschot, Catarina Vieira

19	-
ESN	Hans Neuhoff, Alexander Sell, Stanislav Stoyanov
NI	Grzegorz Braun, Kostas Papadakis
PfE	Jordan Bardella, Vilis Krištopans, András László, Sebastiaan Stöteler, António Tânger Corrêa, Hermann Tertsch, Pierre-Romain Thionnet, Roberto Vannacci, Harald Vilimsky
The Left	Marc Botenga, Danilo Della Valle, Özlem Demirel, Giorgos Georgiou, Rima Hassan

2	0
ECR	Geadis Geadis, Șerban Dimitrie Sturdza

### Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention