2006 discharge: EC general budget, Economic and Social Committee

2007/2042(DEC) - 26/03/2008

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Nils **LUNDGREN** (ID, SE), recommending that the Parliament grant the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) Secretary-General discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget for the financial year 2006.

First of all, the parliamentary committee notes that, in 2006, the EESC had available commitment appropriations amounting to a total of EUR 112 389 673 (compared to EUR 106 880 105 in 2005), with a utilisation rate of 97%.

Overall, MEPs welcome the signature in December 2007 of a new Administrative Cooperation Agreement between the EESC and the Committee of the Regions (CoR) for the period 2008 to 2014, in the belief that this cooperation will be financially advantageous for the European taxpayer. They note that the new Agreement keeps the most important areas (infrastructures, IT and telecommunications as well as translation, including the production of documents) within the Joint Services' remit, while a limited number of services are de-coupled (such as internal services, socio-medical service, the library and prepress). MEPs insist that this de-coupling should be budget neutral and, therefore, urge the two Committees to make a joint analysis as part of the mid-term review in order to assess whether this shift of resources will have been beneficial to both. They also ask to be kept informed of the mini-cooperation agreements in the areas concerned by de-coupling.

Procurement: MEPs, just as the Court of Auditors, note the management and control weaknesses in relation to public procurement and particularly the high percentage of negotiated procedures, instead of calls for tenders, even if it appears that most of the building-related services (previously awarded after negotiated procedures), were signed after calls for tender or call for tender procedures are on-going. In this context, MEPs welcome the creation within the Joint Services of a Contracts Unit providing assistance to all operational departments in the area of public procurement.

Building policy: MEPs note that, according to the Joint Services' answers to the rapporteur's questionnaire, with the occupation of the Remorqueur and Van Maerlant buildings in 2007, 92% of the Committees' total office space is now occupied and their needs for space have been satisfied for the coming years.

Controls: MEPs note that, in its annual activity report, the EESC considered the number of ex post controls performed in 2006 insufficient. However, improvements appear to have been made. In effect, MEPs consider it crucial that the controls carried out be rigorous. They therefore note with satisfaction the personal assurance given by the EESC's Secretary-General regarding the efficiency and regularity of ex ante and ex post controls. At the same time, MEPs welcome the setting up of an audit committee made up of three EESC Members, whose tasks include, among others, the verification of the independence of the Internal Audit unit and the assessment of actions taken in response to the recommendations contained in the audit reports.

Follow-up to the 2005 discharge: lastly, MEPs note with regret that, further to the Belgian criminal proceedings against a former EESC Member concerning travel expenses (see Parliament's discharge resolution of 27 April 2006: DEC/2006/2075), the oral meeting before the tribunal were postponed five times, three of which at the request of the defence. However, they note with satisfaction that the EESC did not encourage those postponements and that rules for reimbursement of travel and meeting expenses of

EESC Members were amended. In particular, these rules take into account technological developments such as e-tickets, online hotel reservations and video-conferencing.