2006 discharge: EC general budget, European Ombudsman

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The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Nils **LUNDGREN** (ID, SE) recommending that the Parliament grant the European Ombudsman discharge in respect of the implementation of its budget for the financial year 2006.

First of all, the parliamentary committee recalls that, in 2006, the European Ombudsman had available commitment appropriations amounting to a total of EUR 7 682 538 (compared to EUR 7 224 554 in 2005), with a utilisation rate of 88.13%. It also notes that, over the period 2003 to 2006, commitment appropriations steadily increased (from EUR 4 438 653 to EUR 7 682 538 (+73%), the number of posts increased from 31 to 57 units (+84%), while complaints increased by 57% and new inquiries opened increased from 253 to 258 (+2%).

Recalling that the European Court of Auditors indicated in its Annual Report that the audit did not give rise to any observations as regards the Ombudsman, MEPs welcome the Ombudsman’s internal management (including staff management as from January 2006) as well as the internal control of the services. However, they note that improvements in efficiency are needed in some areas (for example, identification of sensitive functions) and they encourage the Ombudsman to make all efforts to further improve the efficiency of the internal control framework of his institution.

MEPs welcome the conclusion of the new framework cooperation agreement with the Parliament concerning the provision of certain administrative services (buildings, IT, communications, legal advice, medical services, training, translation and interpretation) and note with satisfaction that the Ombudsman's first Secretary General was appointed on 1 August 2006.

Recruitment of personnel: MEPs note with concern the recruitment difficulties highlighted in the Ombudsman's 2006 annual report, especially in relation to qualified lawyers, due to the two successive waves of enlargement (2004 and 2007), to staff turnover and to the difficulty in attracting and retaining candidates in Strasbourg with temporary contracts.

Declarations of financial interests: MEPs welcome the Ombudsman’s decision to publish the annual declaration of interests of the Ombudsman on his website. Lastly, they welcome the Ombudsman's decision to accede to the Interinstitutional Agreement of 25 May 1999 on internal investigations by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).