2006 discharge: EC general budget, Economic and Social Committee

2007/2042(DEC) - 22/04/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted, by 625 votes in favour, 43 against and 16 abstentions, a Decision to grant the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) Secretary-General discharge in respect of the implementation of its budget for the financial year 2006. The decision to grant discharge also constitutes closure of the accounts of this institution.

At the same time, the Parliament adopted by 611 votes in favour, 42 against and 18 abstentions, a Resolution containing the comments which form part of the decision giving discharge. The report had been tabled for plenary by Nils **LUNDGREN** (ID, SE) on behalf of the Committee on Budgetary Control.

The Resolution recalls 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, the Parliament welcomes 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. It notes 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) – this de-coupling being budget neutral. It urges the two Committees to make carry out a mid-term analysis of this Cooperation Agreement as well as the effect of the decoupling of certain tasks on the resources of the two institutions.

The Parliament makes a series of observations which can be summarised as follows:

- **Procurement**: the Parliament notes the worryingly high percentage of negotiated procedures, instead of calls for tenders, for allocating certain services to this institution. Regretting this situation, the Parliament welcomes the creation, within the Joint Services, of a Contracts Unit providing assistance to all operational departments in the area of public procurement;
- **Controls**: the Parliament notes that, in its annual activity report, the EESC considered the number of ex post controls performed in 2006 insufficient. However, the Parliament welcomes the fact that improvements appear to have been made. It also welcomes the personal assurance given by the EESC's Secretary-General regarding the efficiency and regularity of ex ante and ex post controls as well as 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**: the Parliament notes 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, it notes 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.