2007 discharge: EU general budget, Court of Auditors

2008/2279(DEC) - 16/03/2009

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report drawn up by Søren Bo SØNDERGAARD (GUE /NGL, DK) recommending that the Parliament grant the Secretary-General of the Court of Auditors discharge in respect of the implementation of its budget for the financial year 2007.

The committee recalls that, in 2007, the European Court of Auditors (ECA) had commitment appropriations available amounting to a total of EUR 122 million (compared to EUR 114 million in 2006), with a utilisation rate of 90.21% (below the average of the other institutions).

The committee also recalls that the ECA's accounts were audited by an external firm, which noted that the Court’s financial statements “give a true and fair view of the financial position of the European Court of Auditors as of December 31, 2007”. MEPs also note that the 2007 report of the ECA's Internal Auditor was largely positive, establishing that the K2 building project was effectively managed and that the building was handed over several months ahead of schedule.

Noting that two new Members joined the ECA in the course of 2007 following the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, MEPs consider that the original organising principle of the European audit function - one national from each Member State - has now resulted in an organisation governed by a college of 27 Members and that this structure has reached its limits. This approach must be reformed.

Moreover, MEPs stress that the stronger the ECA is, the stronger the discharge authority. They therefore call on the Member States to initiate discussions on a reform of the ECA, and to include Parliament in these discussions.

MEPs welcome the fact that, in compliance with the ECA's Code of Conduct, ECA Members communicated a declaration of their financial interests and other assets. They reiterate their call that, as a matter of principle and in the interests of transparency, Members of all institutions should be required to submit a declaration of financial interests, which should be accessible on the Internet via a public register.

They also request the ECA to include in its following activity report a chapter giving a detailed account of the follow-up during the year to Parliament's earlier discharge decisions.

Lastly, MEPs regret the fact that, despite amendments to the Financial Regulation, its rules on procurement are still excessively cumbersome for smaller institutions, such as the ECA. They therefore call on the Commission to consult extensively with this institution in order to ensure that its concerns are fully taken into account in the final draft.