2007 discharge: EU general budget, Court of Justice

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

The committee recalls that, in 2007, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) had commitment appropriations available amounting to a total of EUR 275 million (compared to EUR 252 million in 2006), with a utilisation rate of 96.84%, higher than last year.

Noting with satisfaction the adoption by the ECJ of a code of conduct applying to Members and former Members of the Court of Justice, the Court of First Instance and the Civil Service Tribunal (including an obligation to submit a declaration of financial interests), MEPs call for the publication of this document, in the interest of transparency. Moreover, they propose the appointment of an independent monitoring officer whose task would be to report annually and publicly on received declarations in order to ensure credible monitoring and control.

At the same time, MEPs note that, in 2007, the number of officials and agents in service (members of temporary staff and contract agents) increased over the year by 7.9% to a total of 1 928, principally due to the accession of Bulgaria and Romania. They therefore welcome the improvement in the recruiting of qualified staff as well as in the tackling of some difficulties as regards certain posts (mainly interpreters and IT specialists). They regret, however, the absence of specific selection procedures for contract staff for auxiliary tasks and request that appropriate selection procedures be put in place for this category of contract staff as well.

MEPs also welcome the administrative changes made within the Court in terms of auditing and note that a new procedure for disposing of fixed assets was introduced in the context of the setting up, during 2007, of a new integrated system for management and financial control (SAP), representing substantial budget savings and gains in efficiency for the three institutions involved.

MEPs also welcome the reduction in the number of negotiated contracts as a proportion of the number of contracts awarded from 34% in 2006 to 32% in 2007.

They also welcome for the fourth consecutive year the reduction in the duration of proceedings before the ECJ, as well as an increase in the number of cases completed. They note with concern, however, that the backlog of pending cases increased for all three courts, and in particular for the Court of First Instance (+12%) due to an increase in the number of new cases introduced and to the ever-increasing complexity and diversity of actions brought before it.

Although MEPs welcome the measures taken by the Court to increase transparency, they regret the fact that rules on procurement are still excessively cumbersome for smaller institutions. They therefore call on the Commission to study the Court’s Financial Regulation in order to ensure that this institution’s concerns are fully taken into account.