

2007 discharge: EU general budget, Committee of the Regions

2008/2281(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 Committee of the Regions (CoR) discharge in respect of the implementation of its budget for the financial year 2007.

The committee recalls that, in 2007, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) had commitment appropriations available amounting to a total of EUR 68.6 million (compared to EUR 74.4 million in 2006), with a utilisation rate of 96.22%.

Noting that the Court of Auditors indicated that the audit did not give rise to any significant observations as regards the CoR, MEPs recall that the internal audit on salary transfers (completed in 2006) revealed that “weaknesses existed concerning the principle of separation of functions in this area (initiating functions and internal verification)” and “the control environment should have been given greater priority in view of the risks concerned”. They also recall that, following an investigation, OLAF established with regard to eight transfers that they were not in compliance with statutory conditions and recommended recovering the amounts overpaid from the officials concerned. Noting with satisfaction that all recoveries were completed by early 2007, MEPs recall, nevertheless, that, with regard to six staff members, OLAF recommended the opening of disciplinary proceedings (and for five of them it also submitted files to the Belgian authorities). MEPs also note that the procedure concerning those persons is ongoing. They call on the CoR to consider proportionate disciplinary measures if the outcome of the pending cases requires them.

MEPs reiterate their call for Members of the CoR to declare their financial interests.

Administrative Cooperation Agreement with the EESC: MEPs welcome the signature in December 2007 of a new Administrative Cooperation Agreement between the European Economic and Social Committee and the CoR for the period 2008 to 2014. They are convinced that cooperation between the two institutions will be financially advantageous to European taxpayers (in terms of infrastructure, IT and telecommunications and translation). MEPs recall, however, that a number of services will be de-coupled and insist that this decoupling should be budget neutral.

Internal controls: MEPs recall that it is crucial that controls carried out by authorising officers, verifiers and auditors, are sufficiently rigorous. They note with satisfaction the development by the CoR's budget service of a new budget analytical monitoring tool ('BudgetWatch'), providing comprehensive information on all CoR budget lines and sub-lines, including the available appropriations, as well as the establishment of a list of sensitive posts.

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 CoR. 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.