2007 discharge: EU general budget, European Ombudsman

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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 European Ombudsman discharge in respect of the implementation of its budget for the financial year 2007.

The committee recalls that, in 2007, the European Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) had available commitment appropriations amounting to a total of EUR 8.2 million (compared to EUR 7.7 million in 2006), with a utilisation rate of 90.48% (below the average of the other institutions). MEPs note, in particular, that over the period 2003 to 2007, commitment appropriations steadily increased while the number of posts did not increase for the second consecutive year.

Noting that the Court of Auditors' audit of the Ombudsman did not give rise to any significant observations, MEPs note, nevertheless, that, according to the Internal Auditor's report in 2007, the institution was faced with a number of specific problems, including the implementation of an action plan concerning the management of individual entitlements and compliance with public procurement rules.

MEPs also note that improvements in effectiveness were considered to be necessary in some areas, such as identification of sensitive functions, improvement of planning and programming and performance indicators, and encourage the Ombudsman to make every effort to further improve the efficiency of the internal control framework of the institution.

Moreover, MEPs note that the new framework cooperation agreement of indefinite duration between the Ombudsman and the Parliament (which entered into force on 1 April 2006) started to bear fruit in 2007 in terms of the provision of certain administrative services (buildings, IT, communications, legal advice, medical services, training, translation and interpretation). They also praise the Ombudsman for having continued its efforts to develop inter-institutional links with other bodies (in particular OPOCE, EAS and EPSO) and with the Translation Centre.

MEPs welcome the fact that, in 2007, the Ombudsman faced fewer difficulties than in previous years regarding the recruitment of qualified lawyers.

Welcoming the publication of the declaration of interests of the Ombudsman, MEPs congratulate the Ombudsman on its accession on 2 June 2008 to the Interinstitutional Agreement of 25 May 1999 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission concerning internal investigations by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).

They also request that the Ombudsman include in its 2008 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 Ombudsman. 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.