2007 discharge: European Union Fundamental Rights Agency FRA

2008/2257(DEC) - 16/03/2009

The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report drawn up by Christofer FJELLNER (EPP-ED, SE) on discharge to be granted to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), calling on the European Parliament to grant the Executive Director of the Agency discharge in respect of the implementation of its budget for the financial year 2007.

Noting that the Agency's annual accounts for the financial year 2007 are reliable, and the underlying transactions are legal and regular, MEPs approve the closure of the Agency's accounts.

However, they make a number of recommendations as part of the decision on discharge. In addition to the general recommendations appearing in the draft resolution on financial management and control of EU agencies (see 2008/2207(INI)), MEPs make the following observations:

- the Agency should strive for synergies and avoid overlaps with other institutions active in the field of human rights, in particular the Council of Europe;
- the European Court of Auditor's (ECA) observations that, despite the transition from the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) to the Agency and the considerable increase in the budget (EUR 14.2 million as compared to EUR 9.3 million allocated to EUMC in the previous year), almost all appropriations were committed (EUR 13.9 million) in 2007 (which MEPs welcome).

MEPs note, however, that **OLAF has opened an investigation concerning the Agency**. In this context, they request to be informed of the results of the investigation and possible follow-up measures as soon as possible.

In terms of **weaknesses in budget implementation due to the transition from EUMC to FRA**, MEPs note the ECA's finding that EUR 7.5 million had to be carried over due to the extension of the Agency's mandate in 2007, which triggered a delay in the adoption of the new work programme. They encourage the Agency to minimise cancellations of appropriations carried over and to report on progress made in its report on budgetary and financial management 2008.

In terms of **weaknesses in procurement procedures**, MEPs note the ECA's finding that there were weaknesses in the financial evaluation methods for the Agency's calls for tender. In this context, MEPs welcome the fact that the Agency will introduce a new evaluation method in order to obtain best value for money.

Lastly, on the issue of **follow-up to previous discharge exercises**, MEPs recall that, for the three previous financial years (2004-06), the ECA issued a qualified statement of assurance for the EUMC due to weaknesses in procurement procedures. They therefore call on the Agency to pay particular attention to the legality of its procurement procedures for the following financial years.