2007 discharge: EU general budget, European Parliament

2008/2276(DEC) - 23/04/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 419 votes to 106, with 67 abstentions, a decision to grant its President discharge in respect of the European Parliament's budget for the financial year 2007.

The European Parliament adopted a resolution containing a series of observations concerning the discharge decision. It recalled that the final accounts show that, in 2007, the Parliament had a total budget of EUR 1.789 billion (balance sheet at 31 December 2007). It also recalls that this discharge is the last of the 2004-2009 parliamentary term, during which a large number of changes in EU budgetary management in general, and in Parliament's management in particular, have taken place (with the implementation of the new Financial Regulation, the revision of Staff Regulations and Rules applicable to other servants, the accession of 12 new Member States and a significant increase in the number of staff, etc).

The main points of the resolution can be summarised as follows:

Statement of assurance (DAS) by the Secretary-General: welcoming the Secretary-General's statement in which he certifies that he has a reasonable assurance that Parliament's budget has been implemented in accordance with the principles of sound financial management and that the control framework put in place provides the necessary guarantees as to the legality and regularity of the underlying operations, Parliament regrets the observation included in the DAS that the regulatory framework governing parliamentary allowances, including expenditure on parliamentary assistance, has become so complex that it presents serious weaknesses. It recalls, in this regard, that a new system should come into force by July 2009.

Contracts and procurement: Parliament recalls that it publishes general information about contracts awarded on its website, and that, in accordance with the Financial Regulation, it publishes (i) specific information on contracts of a value of over EUR 60 000 in the Official Journal and (ii) a list of contracts of a value of between EUR 25 000 and EUR 60 000 on its website. It also notes that, despite amendments to the Financial Regulation, its rules on procurement are still excessively cumbersome for smaller institutions, especially in relation to tenders for contracts for relatively small amounts. It therefore invites the Commission to consult extensively with the Secretaries-General and administrations of the other institutions in order to ensure that their concerns are also fully taken into account in the final draft.

Activity reports by the Directors-General: Parliament observes with satisfaction that all Directors-General were able to give an unreserved statement of assurance in respect of the implementation of the budget by their services in 2007. Moreover, it adopts a series of recommendations made by its committee responsible on the content of the activity report sby the Directors-General (refer to the summary of the committee responsible of 16/03/2009).

Parliamentary assistance allowance: Parliament welcomes the achievement - in response to previous discharge resolutions (2006) - in having obtained the necessary supporting documents to regularise virtually all claims (99.9 % by amount) for the period 2004-2007. It calls on the Secretary-General to provide Members who have complied with the rules concerning the use of the parliamentary assistance allowance with a letter from administration stating so.

European Political Parties: Parliament points out that in all reports, the auditors certified unreservedly that the accounts submitted were in conformity with the main statutory provisions of Regulation (EC) No 2004/2003 and that they presented a true and faithful picture of the situation of the political parties at the close of the 2007 financial year. Parliament notes that, as in 2005 and 2006, budgetary implementation by two parties (AEN and PDE) fell significantly short of the provisional budget, and that the authorising officer was instructed to recover as regards 2007. Parliament recalls that the Bureau took note of the proposed code of conduct for electoral campaigns by political parties in the context of the European elections 2009.

Voluntary pension fund: Parliament notes that, in spring 2008, the total membership of the scheme was 1 113, including 478 active MEPs. It stresses that at 31 December 2007 the fund's assets were EUR 214 887 336. Moreover, it notes - in relation to the accounts of the ASBL managing the Members' voluntary pension fund - the independent auditor's statement that the assets of the ASBL were actuarially deficient by EUR 30 917 229 as at 31 December 2007 and note further the external auditor's statement that the final responsibility for the payment of benefits **rests with Parliament**. Parliament considers, however, that this interpretation does not accord fully with the original conception of the voluntary pension fund as a self-governing entity outside the structures of the institution. It therefore invites Parliament's Legal Service to give its views before the entry into force of the new statute on the question as to whether ultimate financial responsibility for the voluntary pension fund lies with the fund and its members or with Parliament. Noting the intention to negotiate a convention between Parliament and the fund, Parliament points out that **under no circumstances will Parliament provide extra money from the budget to cover the fund's deficit**, as it did in the past. It stresses that the Parliament commissioned an updated actuarial study examining the fund following the recent financial/banking crisis. It also notes that the Bureau decided not to comply with a recommendation by the European Ombudsman (complaint 655/2006/(SAB)ID) that Parliament should give access to the list of members of the voluntary pension scheme, notwithstanding a positive opinion of the European Data Protection Supervisor. Parliament therefore calls on the Bureau to reconsider its position and to publish the list.

Environment: lastly, Parliament recalls that, on 27 November 2007, the President and Secretary-General signed an agreement for an environmental certification of Parliament's buildings, and that Parliament now has EMAS (Environmental Management Scheme) certification for all three places of work. It stresses that the Bureau set a 30% reduction in carbon emissions by 2020 as the first and main target for the environmental management system. It therefore calls on the Secretary-General to inform its competent committees to provide precise figures on CO_2 emissions reductions achieved.