2007 discharge: EU general budget, European Ombudsman

2008/2282(DEC) - 23/04/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 581 votes to 12, with 42 abstentions, a decision to grant the European Ombudsman discharge in respect of the implementation of its budget for the financial year 2007. The decision to grant discharge is also an approval of the closure of the accounts of this institution.

Moreover, the Parliament adopted a resolution with observations which form an integral part of the decision to grant discharge. The resolution 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). Parliament notes, 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.

Other main issues in the resolution can be summarised as follows:

Internal audit: noting that the Court of Auditors' audit of the Ombudsman did not give rise to any significant observations, Parliament notes, 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. It also notes 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.

Framework Agreement with the European Parliament: Parliament notes 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). It also praises 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. In addition, Parliament welcomes 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, Parliament congratulates 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). It also requests 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, Parliament regrets the fact that, despite amendments to the Financial Regulation, its rules on procurement are still excessively cumbersome for smaller institutions, such as the Ombudsman. It therefore calls 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.