

2007 discharge: EU general budget, Committee of the Regions

2008/2281(DEC) - 23/04/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 409 votes to 56, with 10 abstentions, a decision to 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 decision to grant discharge is also an approval of the closure of the accounts of this institution.

Moreover, the Parliament adopted by 438 votes to 33, with 6 abstentions, a resolution with observations which form an integral part of the decision to grant discharge. The resolution points out that in 2007 the 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%.

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

- Pending cases concerning the CoR: noting that the Court of Auditors' audit did not give rise to any significant observations as regards the CoR, the Parliament recalls 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". It also recalls 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, the Parliament further recalls 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). Moreover, it notes that the procedure concerning those persons is ongoing. It calls on the CoR to consider proportionate disciplinary measures if the outcome of the pending cases requires them;
- **Administrative Cooperation Agreement with the EESC:** the Parliament welcomes 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. It is convinced that cooperation between the two institutions will be financially advantageous to European taxpayers (in terms of infrastructure, IT and telecommunications and translation). It recalls, however, that a number of services will be de-coupled and insists that this decoupling should be budget neutral;
- **Internal controls:** the Parliament recalls that it is crucial that controls carried out by authorising officers, verifiers and auditors, are sufficiently rigorous. It notes 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. It also requests the CoR to include in its following activity report (financial year 2008) a chapter giving a detailed account of the follow-up during the year to Parliament's earlier discharge decisions.

Furthermore, the Parliament reiterates its call for Members of the CoR to declare their financial interests.

Lastly, the 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 CoR. 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.

