

2010 discharge: European Environment Agency (EEA)

2011/2217(DEC) - 23/10/2012 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a decision concerning the discharge **to be granted to the Executive Director of the European Environment Agency (EEA) in respect of the implementation of the Agency's budget for the financial year 2010**. The decision to grant the discharge shall also constitute the closure of the accounts for this Agency.

Parliament took this decision **contrary to the position of the committee responsible** which had called on Parliament to refuse the Agency discharge, and which referred to an earlier resolution adopted in plenary in May 2012 taking a similar stance, citing several problems on **conflict of interests** of some Agency personnel (please see the summary of 10/05/2012.) The plenary this time adopted by 374 votes 235 with 39 abstentions, a resolution granting the discharge but **calling on the Agency to reform the way in which it manages human resources**.

Other salient points in the resolution may be summarised as follows:

- **selection of the Executive Director of the Agency:** Parliament expects, without prejudice to the Agency's independence, **an open and transparent selection procedure regarding the appointment of the Executive Director in June 2013** that guarantees a rigorous evaluation of candidates and a high level of independence. It suggests, that a hearing of the candidates by the competent committees in Parliament will be part of the appointment procedure to the position of Executive Director;
- **budgetary and financial management:** Parliament recalls that the Agency covered its building with a **Green Façade** at a cost of EUR 294 641, and that no public tender was issued. In order to cover the costs, a budget transfer has reinforced an Agency budget line. Parliament calls therefore for the establishment of clear internal rules and the implementation of *ex ante* controls on exceptional expenditures. It is firmly convinced that necessary steps have to be taken should cases of non-compliance with existing rules occur and that the Agency should draw up an action plan, accompanied by a precise timetable, **aiming to remedy shortcomings**. Implementation of the plan should be monitored by the European Parliament;
- **human resources:** Parliament begins by observing that the Agency hosted 12 guest scientists working at its premises without publishing, for 11 of them, the *curriculum vitae*, including at least their educational and work background. It acknowledges the Management Board's statement that rules for the selection and conduct of visiting scientists will be strengthened in order to ensure greater clarity and transparency. Parliament also recalls certain points already made in its aforementioned resolution of 10 May 2012 **on conflict of interests of certain Agency personnel** (particularly the position of the Executive Director of the Agency who was a trustee and a member of the International Advisory Board of Earthwatch, an international environmental charity, whose links with the Agency have given rise to a number of questions.) Parliament acknowledges the decision of the Management Board to implement *ex ante* controls on the membership of the Executive Director in external boards, but it notes **several other problems** particularly some unusual involvement of scientists from Worldwatch Institute Europe in the Agency's work. Generally, Parliament welcomes the measures taken by the Agency to improve the **management of conflicts of interest** but it asks the Agency to make these measures public and to foster a debate on the policy. Parliament raises the question of the *curriculum vitae* of management staff and of the members of the scientific committee, some of which are still not available on the Agency's website. It calls on the Agency to promote greater transparency in terms of preventing and combating

conflict of interests. It also expects to receive information on ongoing administrative investigations related to the Agency.

Parliament stresses that the Agency is required to establish appropriate contacts with interested parties and to cooperate with stakeholders such as external organisations, but notes that **those activities have not been accompanied by respective measures and rules for excluding possible reputational risk**. It welcomes the commitment by the Management Board and the Executive Director to take appropriate steps in order to eliminate those risks immediately.

Lastly, Parliament welcomes, in general, the Joint Statement and the Common Approach on decentralised agencies agreed in June 2012 by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, which addresses and takes up some elements important to the discharge procedure.