2011 discharge: EU general budget, Economic and Social Committee

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OBJECTIVE: presentation of the Report of the Court of Auditors on the 2011 budget (section VI – European Economic and Social Committee).

CONTENT: the Court of Auditors published its 35th Annual Report on the implementation of the EU budget for the 2011 financial year.

In accordance with the tasks and objectives conferred on the Court of Auditors by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, it provides under the discharge procedure, for both the European Parliament and Council, a statement of assurance ("DAS") about the reliability of the accounts and the legality and regularity of the transactions of each institution, body or agency of the EU, based on an independent external audit.

The audit also focuses on the budget implementation of the European Economic and Social Committee.

On the basis of its audit work, the Court considers that payments for "Administrative and other expenditure" policy are, overall, significantly error-free. **The estimated error rate is 0.1 %.**

The Court, however, draws attention to the errors and weaknesses which did not affect the Court's conclusion. The Court examined a sample of **procurement procedures** and noted several weaknesses in the application of selection and award criteria, some of which had an impact on the results of the procedure. Other weaknesses relate to the organisation of cross border competition, to the management of automatic award procedures and to the respect of provisions as regards the drafting and filing of tendering documents.

The Court also detects weaknesses when it reviewed a sample of calculations and **payments of social allowances** as well as a sample of employment contracts concluded with temporary agents.

The Court therefore recommends that the institutions and bodies of the EU:

- take steps to ensure that staff deliver, at appropriate intervals, documents **confirming their personal situation** and implement a system for the timely monitoring of these documents;
- improve the IT systems used to manage these payments to ensure that the allowances paid by national authorities are updated automatically;
- take steps to ensure that the provisions of the relevant regulations are applied when concluding, extending or modifying employment contracts with non-permanent staff;
- ensure that authorising officers improve **the design, coordination and performance of procurement procedures** through appropriate checks and better guidance.

The Court also makes a number of comments specific to each institution or body of the European Union. These observations do not affect the positive overall appraisal given that they do not significantly affect overall administrative expenditure.

In the specific case of the audit of the European Economic and Social Committee, the Court notes in particular the following points:

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- **contracts with temporary and contract staff:** an examination of the procedures for the extension and modification of contracts of temporary and contract staff found that the provisions included in the internal rules and in the guidelines applicable to the selection and grading of these staff did not consistently take into account professional experience acquired by these staff. In addition, one of the guidelines applied had no date of entry into force. The Court finds that these inconsistencies increase the risk of error in the grading of temporary staff employed under the provisions of Article 2(b) of the CEOS.
- **grade and classification of staff:** one staff member recruited as a temporary agent under the above mentioned provisions, out of four cases examined, was graded one grade above the basic grade of his career. This staff member was re-graded to the basic grade six months later when it was found that there was a lack of posts for the promotion of permanent staff. The Court considers that this situation shows a weakness in the planning of the allocation of available posts among the various categories of staff.