Tourism sector: fraud and irregularities

1997/2043(INI) - 03/02/1998

The Committee on adopting by a substantial majority the report by Rosemarie WEMHEUER (PES, D) on the Commission's handling of fraud allegations in the tourism sector. In a strongly worded text the Committee found that since 1989 the Commission had, after unjustified delay, provided Parliament with incomplete and misleading information about the extent of fraud and corruption within its own services and the measures taken to deal with it. It also noted that the Commission had been slow to act against the persons concerned, at either the disciplinary or judicial level, delaying in some cases the progress of criminal investigations, and only moving when the force of public opinion made action unavoidable. Such behaviour the Committee considered, formed part of a wider administrative culture which placed the avoidance of public criticism above the need to deal effectively with internal mis-management and mal-practice. In the circumstances, Parliamentary supervision of the Commission was fundamentally undermined and public confidence in the EU institutions seriously threatened. In conclusion the Committee called for a sweeping reappraisal of the relationship between Parliament and the Commission, with new powers of democratic control for the EP urgently required to reaffirm the principle of accountability in a Commission grown accustomed to a bureaucratic culture lacking in transparency. Furthermore the Committee felt that Parliament should not rule out the creation of a Committee of Inquiry and that the 1996 discharge should not be granted until Parliament had been fully informed in a satisfactory manner. Before the vote Commissioner Erkki LIIKANEN had expressed regret that the Commission had not acted as rapidly as it should have done on the tourism case. "The Commission accepts, he said, that many aspects could and should have been handled differently". He then explained the measures taken since 1995, when the present Commission came into office. These included measures to bring about sound and efficient management, restructure DG XXIII and ensure that a situation similar to the one in the tourism sector be avoided in the future. "We have learned the lessons he concluded, the Commission will be providing the European Parliament with full information". This report would not rule out a future Committee of Inquiry into this subject.