1997 discharge: EC general budget, 6th and 7th European Development Funds EDF

1998/2010(DEC) - 11/01/2000

The committee adopted a report by Lousewies van der LAAN (ELDR, NL) covering three matters: the 1997 general budget discharge, the closing of accounts for the 1997 financial year and the resolution accompanying the 1997 discharge. Although the committee recommended that Parliament grant the Commission a discharge for the 1997 general budget, the rapporteur stressed that there should be no relaxation of Parliament's pressure on the Commission to make improvements. The resolution highlighted a number of problems and suggested ways of solving them. It reminded the Commission that the discharge being given was based on the assumption of full implementation of its commitments under the reform programme. As regards institutional management and supervision problems, the committee wanted the Commission to devise a system whereby the recommendations of the Court of Auditors were systematically followed up. It added that the powers of a priori supervision (the Financial Controller's approval) and auditing powers needed to be separated. On the subject of staff policy, while the codes of conduct represented significant progress, the committee believed they should be supplemented with more precise provisions concerning incompatibility in cases where a Commissioner had a direct interest in an act of recruitment, administration or budgetary implementation for which he or his departments were directly responsible. The codes should also be made binding. The committee felt that the technical assistance offices (TAOs) should be excluded from any European public-service functions and be confined to implementation tasks. As regards the right to information, it pointed out that Parliament's rights in this area were more far-reaching than those of the Council but argued that it should have at least as much access to Commission documents as the Court of Auditors. Exceptional restrictions should only apply to the procedures for forwarding, disseminating and collecting data and not to the subject of the information. On the fight against fraud and corruption, the committee noted that a full list of suspected cases of fraud had still not been produced or forwarded to the judicial authorities. Lastly, regarding external aid, the committee criticised the management of aid to Palestine and called for measures to be taken by 31 March 2000.