

# 1998 discharge: EC general budget

1999/2050(DEC) - 23/03/2000

The committee adopted the report by Gabriele STAUNER (EPP/ED, D) calling for postponement of the 1998 budget discharge. One demand made by the committee was that the Commission should cut considerably by 2001 the current rate of "substantial" errors in the implementation of appropriations noted by the Court of Auditors, with a view to obtaining a positive "statement of assurance" by 2003 at the latest. The committee also called on the Commission to promise not to drop the Flécharde case (a fraud case in the early 1990s involving exports of Irish butter which were supposed to go to the ex-Soviet Union but ended up in Poland) until the Court of Auditors' opinion on it had been analysed and all Parliament's outstanding questions on it had been resolved. OLAF was asked to launch an investigation into the Flécharde case to identify those responsible for the disappearance of the documents, and the Commission was asked to present a detailed proposal for a new archive system. The report also called on the Commission to re-examine the case of ECHO (the EU humanitarian office) and, if new evidence became available, to re-open the investigation. In the case of the MED programmes it said the Commission should meet Parliament's demand of 1998 for the complete file to be submitted to the judicial authorities in Belgium, France and Italy. If necessary, in the light of the findings of these authorities, it should institute statutory disciplinary proceedings. The Commission was also asked to provide the findings of the enquiry into contracts granted to "visiting scientists" and to give any information it had about irregular contracts to the Belgian public prosecutor's office, which was already looking into the case. The committee wanted the Commission to submit a report on measures taken against Member States which had not yet implemented the integrated control system for agricultural expenditure, as well as an update of the follow-up to recommendations of Parliament's committee of inquiry into the transit system (1997). It also called on the Commission to present a detailed report on all disciplinary proceedings taken since 1998 in connection with the protection of the Community's financial interests. Lastly, the Commission was asked to give a clear commitment to the principles of access to information, to put forward proposals for the creation of an external chamber, at the Court of Auditors or the Court of Justice, to conduct disciplinary proceedings relating to budgetary irregularities and to introduce an independent external component into its own disciplinary procedures.