

1998 discharge: EC general budget

1999/2050(DEC) - 27/06/2000

The committee adopted the report by Gabriele STAUNER (EPP/ED, D) recommending that Parliament grant the Commission the budgetary discharge for 1998 and close the accounts for the same year. On 13 April Parliament had postponed its decision on whether to grant the discharge and had given its reasons for taking this step. It had called on the Commission to submit a number of reports and to give specific undertakings with the aim of ensuring that the Commission would do everything possible to improve budgetary implementation and combat fraud, corruption and mismanagement. The committee felt that the Commission had met most of these demands. It noted that the Commission was prepared to take action to cut drastically the error rate in implementation of the budget. With regard to the Flécharde case, the Commission had explained its actions and replied to the various questions raised. The committee nevertheless believed that the Flécharde case should not be regarded as closed until the issues it had raised had been satisfactorily resolved. The Commission had also taken action, including disciplinary proceedings, on other matters, such as the ECHO (EU humanitarian aid office) case, the MED affair and the case of a visiting scientist employed at the instigation of former Commissioner Edith Cresson. The committee reiterated Parliament's call for the introduction of an external element in disciplinary proceedings, noting that the Commission had done no more than accept the principle of an interinstitutional disciplinary board. The committee, however, argued that the current practice of administrative investigations and disciplinary proceedings within the Commission should be evaluated by an independent external body in the light of best practice in public administrations. The committee's report also mentioned that the Commission and Parliament were currently negotiating an interinstitutional agreement on Parliament's access to information. It further noted that the Commission had brought forward a comprehensive package of proposals in its White Paper on administrative reform. It also called for the role of the financial controller to be strengthened, in line with the Court of Auditors' recommendations. Lastly, it reiterated Parliament's call for the Commission to present the necessary legislative proposals to enable a chamber to be set up in the Court of Auditors or the Court of Justice to handle disciplinary proceedings for budgetary irregularities.