

2000 discharge: EC general budget, section III

Commission

2001/2102(DEC) - 26/03/2002

The committee adopted the report by John Joseph McCARTIN (EPP-ED, IRL) recommending that discharge be granted to the Commission in respect of the implementation of the EU budget for 2000. The outcome was the result of a compromise aimed at overcoming the differences within the committee, which had resulted in a failure to obtain a clear result after voting in a previous meeting. It included the adoption of an amendment related to the flax affair in Spain, recalling that Members of the Commission shall be completely independent in the performance of their duties, and that the role of Commissioners' Private Offices was not to interfere in departmental management. The committee said that the outstanding feature of the 2000 financial year was the exceptionally high budget surplus (EUR 11,6 bn, or 14% of the budget), which revealed a failure to provide timely and efficient mechanisms for the smooth operation of the Structural Funds. It was noted that the very complexity of the rules made effective controls difficult. The committee said that better coordination could prevent duplication of effort and allow a better division of work, and the Commission was therefore asked to examine the feasibility of introducing a single audit model in relation to the EU budget with a view to enhancing the quality of audit activities. The committee also said that some common policies were themselves conducive to fraud, particularly where export refunds were used to support the export of surpluses mainly for dairy products, sugar, cereals and beef. It noted, however, that the export refunds system was still important in the CAP and that it had a considerable impact on agricultural and food markets in the EU and in third countries. The Commission was urged to apply to export refunds the same policy of transparency used in other domains by making public the names of all undertakings and amounts that benefited from this scheme. Referring to a number of specific cases, the committee wondered if the present system was sufficient to encourage Member States to combat fraud and irregularities. The Commission was invited to propose a simplification of the infringement procedure, allowing a lump sum or penalty payment to be paid by the Member State in question. Finally, MEPs called for the establishment of a European Public Prosecutor to be included within the Convention so that it could be an integral part of the Treaty well before enlargement.