2000 discharge: follow-up on the European Parliament's resolution. Report

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The committee adopted the report by John McCARTIN (EPP-ED, IRL) welcoming the Commission's follow-up report to Parliament's observations in its discharge decision for the 2000 financial year. It underlined the progress made in cooperation between the Commission and the EP but highlighted a number of outstanding issues: - the recurrent problem of the budget surplus: the Commission was asked to further refine and improve its assessment of budgetary needs and its evaluation of running policies. As under-expenditure appeared to be largely attributable to the complexity of the Structural Funds regulations, the committee called for them to be simplified; - the revised staff regulation currently under examination by the EP: the report recommended that Parliament's final position, especially concerning the whistle-blowing procedure, disciplinary sanctions, categories of staff and the use of "contractual agents", be given very serious consideration; - the large amount of unduly paid funds not yet recovered (EUR 2.245 billion): the committee called for more detailed information and urged the Commission to take the appropriate steps until the end of the current year for the recovery of old unduly paid funds and to report to Parliament on the results of the internal audit of the new system of recovery; - the reporting of fraud and irregularities by Member States: MEPs called on the Commission to ensure that standard procedures were carefully followed and that OLAF reported regularly on the success and failure rate of its prosecutions, the number of prosecutions, the total number of cases opened and the quality of cooperation from national authorities; - the adulteration of agricultural products: the Commission was asked to employ all available scientific measures to combat this problem, for example in the olive oil and butter sector. The committee said that it was unacceptable that after 2.5 years Parliament had not been informed in more detail about the case of adulterated butter and the subsequent loss to the budget. It also wanted the Commission to provide an update on all previously-mentioned cases of fraud in the EU involving flax subsidies and payments; - export refunds: the report stressed that this was a high-risk area for fraud and criticised the refusal by the Commission and Council to delete export refunds for live animal transport despite Parliament's recommendations.