2001 discharge: EC general budget, section III Commission

2002/2101(DEC) - 24/03/2003

The committee adopted the report by Paulo CASACA (PES, P) recommending that the Commission be granted discharge for the EU general budget for 2001. In its report, the committee also approved the closure of the accounts for 2001 but it confirmed the reservations voiced by the Court of Auditors and by the activity report for 2001 of the DG Budget director. The committee also stressed that the Commission had an obligation to establish a modern, reliable and accurate accounting system for the financial year 2005. It expressed concern at the high turnover of administrative staff in high ranking and crucial posts, such as the Commission accounting officer. MEPs said that in future the accounting officer should sign the accounts presented under his/her responsibility. They also wanted the Court of Auditors to publish the error rate for each individual Commission DG and they called on the Commission to carry out an external audit of its treasury system. Elsewhere in its report the committee focused on the Commission's future accounting system and said it needed modern, reliable computerisation. It also stressed the importance of outsourcing the Commission's work on a rational basis and for a staff code of conduct to ensure that the public and private interests of staff were kept separate. MEPs welcomed the suspension of all new contracts with EUROGRAMME while also criticising the fact that the recommendations of the Eurostat internal audit service had not been completely followed up. The committee also drew attention once again to the problem of unspent budget resources, especially in the Structural Funds, a problem exacerbated by the "gross overestimates" and the "obvious lack of sincerity" on the part of certain Member States such as the UK and Italy. MEPs called on the Commission to consider introducing a penalty mechanism in such cases and they maintained that the Commission was reluctant to use its full power to fine Member States for their failures to comply with Community law. The committee suggested the introduction of a system of fines incorporating both a lump sum penalty and a daily fine.