1999 discharge: follow-up. Report

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PURPOSE : to present the follow-up report on the EP 1999 Discharge Resolution for the Commission. CONTENT : at the request of the European Parliament, the Commission produced a report on the measures taken in light of the observations made by the Commission when the discharge procedure was voted on by the Parliament on 4 April 2000. The Commission notes that the recommendations made are already well incorporated in its actions, whether they concern in-depth reform of management and control or correction or errors and irregularities under its general mission of protecting the financial interests of the European Union. However, in some cases, the Commission is not able to satisfy all of Parliament's requirements immediately. Finally, the Commission considers that information transmitted to the discharge authority enables the European Parliament to exercise effective control of the work of the Commission. In relation to the reform of management control instruments, the Commission notes that the implementation of the reform meets the recommendations of the European Parliament, in particular with regard to the 10-point action plan. The Commission considers that in this field, the discharge resolution provides encouragement and supports its reform policy. This is the case for the increased responsibility of actors, which results in particular in a more precise definition of the objectives to be achieved by each DG. Similarly, the reform of the Commission puts emphasis on management controls including evaluation and independent internal auditing of its activities. The Commission also puts greater stress on evaluation, which will allow it to measure the quality of its management and to check whether the objectives are actually achieved. Moreover, like the European Parliament, the Commission is anxious to guarantee the integrity and transparency of the institution. For this reason, it takes on, as far as it is able, the objectives set by the discharge authority on the ethics and integrity of public service and on strengthening of its powers with regard to disciplinary matters. The protection of financial interests of the European Union is one of the Commission's priorities. The improvement of the instruments enabling it to recover sums wrongly paid is a constant concern and is integrated into the reform process. The Commission has prepared several measures which will make it possible to strengthen and clarify the powers of each individual, give authorising officers more responsibility and secure the means of keeping closer watch on amounts to be recovered. The means of preventing fraud are also developed (exclusion of suspect tenderers from calls for tenders, exchange of information with the Member States). Similarly, the creation of centralised databases on contracts and contractors will make it possible to check all the stages of contractual relations between the Commission and final beneficiaries. Lastly, following the so-called Fléchard case: the Commission will adopt guidelines on the implementation of the proportionality principle concerning debt waivers. With regard to the other reforms, the Commission considers that the discharge resolution supports its action in several other fields such as external actions. In this field, the Commissionundertook reforms aimed inter alia at clarifying internal responsibilities, improving the quality of programming, phasing out the Technical Assistance Offices and closing old and dormant commitments wherever possible. The Commission announces that it is open to pursue a constructive and forward-looking dialogue with Parliament on possible further measures to improve the quality and speed of aid and delivery. In general terms efforts are being made to rationalise the use of human resources. As regards the financial corrections for Structural Funds: two regulations adopted in March 2001 organise the respective responsibilities of the Member States and of the Commission in this field. They were inspired by the methodology governing the clearance of the agricultural accounts. On the protection of the financial interests of the European Union, the Commission endeavours to correct any irregular situation as soon as possible. Concerning the common agricultural policy, the Commission has brought infringment proceedings against several Member States and decided to reduce advances for four Member States. Finally, with regard to the policy of information for the discharge authority, the Commission fully complied with the Treaty obligtions and provided Parliament with a large volume of detailed information which allowed Parliament to act as the discharge authority. It receives weekly budget implementation figures. It will receive information concerning the audits of the Commission via the IAS annual report and the Annual Report of OLAF.