Tourism sector: fraud and irregularities

1997/2043(INI) - 17/02/1998 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Adopting the report by Mrs Rosemarie WEMHEUER (PSE, D) concerning the European Commission's conduct in respect of alleged fraud and irregularities in the tourism sector, the European Parliament concluded that: - since 1989 the Commission had withheld important information from Parliament or had provided information only after delays and, at times, had provided misleading information on the extent of fraud and corruption within its services; - the Commission had been slow to take the necessary disciplinary action against officials suspected of fraud and had still not take action against senior officials responsible. Parliament stressed that, in certain cases, the Commission had delayed the progress of criminal investigations by refusing to comply with requests for the waiver of official immunity. Parliament took the view that this reflected lax, unsatisfactory and irregular administrative practices which had been tolerated until they became public knowledge; - the accountability of the Commission to the political and judicial authorities of the Member States was neither guaranteed nor enforceable. It added that its power of discharge was subverted by its inability to obtain accurate information, thereby seriously compromising public confidence in the European institutions; - the investigations carried out were characterised by poor coordination between the Commission and the national departments affected by the fraud. In conclusion, the European Parliament called for re-examination of the reasons for which neither the European Parliament nor national judicial authorities were informed of the actions taken by Commission officials. It considered that reforms were necessary to make the Commission a more open and accountable administration and proposed the implementation of an interinstitutional agreement in which the Commission has the same obligations towards the Committee on Budgetary Control of the European Parliament as it has in the committee of inquiry procedure (Parliament decided against proposing the setting up of a committee of inquiry as requested by its Committee on Budgets). It called on the Commission to submit regular information on the list of all current internal investigations and a list of all special audits carried out by the directorate-general for financial control. Finally, it announced that it would not grant the 1996 discharge until the information had been provided in a form acceptable to Parliament and the Commission had taken the necessary steps to inform the relevant national legal authorities. It also instructed its Committee on Budgetary Control to reform its internal structures and procedures in order to take account of the growing importance of its control tasks.