1997 discharge: EC general budget, 6th and 7th European Development Funds EDF

1998/2010(DEC) - 19/01/2000 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution and two accompanying decisions concerning the discharge of the EU accounts for the 1997 financial year. Parliament's Rapporteur was Ms. Lousewies van der LAAN (ELDR, NL). The Parliament reminds the Commission that the discharge which is being given to it is based on the assumption that its commitments under the reform programme will be implemented in full. It recalls the findings contained in the Court of Auditors' 1997 Annual Report and the subsequent audit which revealed that there was still a high percentage of significant errors, and, furthermore, declares that it will be unable to close the accounts for the 1999 financial year if the Commission has failed to rectify the accounting errors identified by the Court of Auditors. With respect to institutional problems of management and supervision, the Parliament calls on the Commission to develop a system whereby the recommendations of the Court of Auditors are systematically followed up and reviewed and, where complaints are repeated two years in a row, the Commission should hold management accountable for persistent failure to improve the situation. It calls on the Court of Auditors: - to monitor systematically, each year, the response to the criticisms expressed in its previous reports; - to negotiate framework agreements with national courts of auditors whereby the latter carry out complementary checks on Community policies conducted in partnership, on the basis of a programme drawn up by common agreement. In regard to staff policy, the Parliament calls on the Commission to state clearly in its reform programme all its priorities and the criteria for the selection of resources to be assigned thereto on the basis of a system which can combine activity-based budgeting with an integrated resource-management system. It welcomes the Commission's plans to protect whistleblowers and calls on it to ensure that staff are encouraged to help work towards a professional climate in which whistleblowing will no longer be necessary. It calls on the Court of Auditors to assess the administrative decentralisation policy which the Commission has embarked upon as part of the MAP 2000 Programme. As to the question of the Technical Assistance Offices, the EP notes the Commission's attempts to rationalise the TAOs by establishing a more restrictive legislative and budgetary framework and by introducing a vademecum which prohibits subcontracting of public administration responsibilities and steps up supervision and monitoring of these bodies. It is only partially satisfied, however, and hopes that the Commission will include in its reform programme further improvements. It also calls on the Commission immediately to waive the immunity of its officials if and when requested by a national prosecutor, and to bring a parallel civil action before the Belgian courts if the Public Prosecutions Department decides to institute criminal proceedings in the four fraud cases reported by the Commission. In relation to the discharge authority's access to information, the EP recalls that the Commission, in connection with the exercise of its powers over the implementation of the budget, must submit any necessary information to the EP at the latter's request. It notes that the EC Treaty provides for no such right to information for the Council in the area of the budget, so thatthe Parliament's right to information in this area is thus more far-reaching than that of the Council. With respect to the discharge and management of Community policies in partnership (SEM 2000), the EP calls on the Commission to commit itself, in its reform programme, to: 1) arrange for observers from Parliament to attend meetings of the body responsible for the SEM 2000 programme when the functions of Parliament as a legislative, budgetary or budgetary control authority are at issue; 2) establish, under the SEM 2000 programme, a procedure whereby Member States can be informed of the comments of the discharge authority; 3) seek to ensure that national administrations submit to the discharge authority their comments on the cooperation they have afforded to the Commission, as referred to in Article 274 of the EC Treaty. In connection with combatting fraud and corruption, the EP calls on the Commission to present a list of Commission officials or other employees who may be involved in fraud or corruption in time for the 1998 discharge procedure and at the latest by 01.03.2000. As the Commission has not complied with its request to notify the national judicial authorities of all cases where it is suspected that Commission officials or other employees may be involved in fraud or corruption, it calls on it to do this

also by 01.03.2000 deadline. Specifically in regard to aid to Palestine, the Parliament considers that the Commission still needs to take a number of measures with regard to its aid to Palestine by 31 March 2000, including the opening of Gaza hospital and work to begin at the site for the construction of the seat of the Palestinian parliament.