1998 discharge: EC general budget, other sections

1999/2166(DEC) - 13/04/2000 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted its decision granting discharge in respect of the general budget of the EU for the 1998 financial year relating to the Court of Justice, Court of Auditors and the Committee of the Regions. It also adopted a resolution informing the Economic and Social Committee of the reason for the postponement of the decision concerning discharge in respect of the budget for the 1998 financial year. Parliament's Rapporteur was Ms. Heide RÜHLE (Green/EFA, D). In regard to the Court of Justice, the EP states that its assessment of the Court's buildings policy will be made in the light of the Special Report the Court of Auditors is currently drawing up concerning annexes to the Palais building. It requests the Court to submit, in time for the first reading of the 2001 draft budget, a report on ways to improve the quality of financial forecasts used for the endowment of Article 270 (Official Journal) in light of the continuous need for the topping up of its appropriations in the 1995-97 financial years. With respect to the Court of Auditors, Parliament reiterates its disapproval of the declining trend in the utilisation of appropriations earmarked for Chapter 15 (staff exchanges between Community institutions and the public and private sectors); it underlines that those exchanges can be beneficial to national civil servants and administrations and calls on the Court to submit, in time for the first reading of the 2001 budget, a report outlining its policy as regards the staff exchanges in question and the problems which have hindered full utilisation of available resources from 1997 onwards. It also notes that allocations earmarked for Article 104 (mission expenses, local travel costs and incidental expenditure) had to be topped up twice to allow Members to complete the 1998 Audit Programme; it therefore asks the Court to improve planning and forecasting in connection with that sector. The Committee of the Regions is urged to take all necessary steps to reverse the seriously declining rate of utilisation of appropriations automatically carried over from the previous financial year; in this respect, the EP asks for a report to be submitted to it by 15/06/2000 on all Section VI appropriations automatically carried over from 1997 to 1998 and from 1998 to 1999 where the rate of cancellations is greater than 10%. Parliament reiterates its request for the Committee to improve financial management of the appropriations, the implementation of which has been entrusted to it by the budgetary authority. It also insists that the Committee's latest set of rules, which entered into force in April 2000, aimed at bolstering controls relating to the refunding of travel expenses and daily subsistence and travel allowances, must be fully in line with the Court of Auditors' observations. Parliament regrets that the CoR and the Economic and Social Committee have not acted with the required diligence with regard to their relocation to the Belliard building and underlines that the current situation is detrimental to the Union's budget with expenditure on rent and associated costs being charged in connection with both the current and futurepremises of the Committees. The Economic and Social Committee is urged to take all necessary steps to reverse the declining rate of utilisation of appropriations automatically carried over from the previous financial year and, in this respect, Parliament asks for a report to be submitted to it by 15/06 /2000 on all Section VI appropriations automatically carried over from 1997 to 1998 and from 1998 to 1999 where the rate of cancellations is greater than 10%. It also asks the Committee to improve financial management of the appropriations, the implementation of which has been entrusted to it by the budgetary authority. With regard to the follow-up to the 1996 Annual Report of the Court of Auditors, Parliament regrets that it took the Economic and Social Committee over 15 months to comply with the decision of the discharge authority to refer the matter to OLAF. It therefore postpones the discharge decision in respect of the 1998 financial year until it has received the conclusions of the OLAF inquiry.