# 2001 discharge: EC general budget, European Parliament

2002/2102(DEC) - 08/04/2003 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

By adopting the report by Mr Bart STAES (Greens, ALE, B) by 296 votes for, 243 against and 11 abstentions, the European Parliament has agreed with the comments made by the committee responsible (please refer to the previous document) and gives discharge to its Secretary General for the implementation of the 2001 budget for the European Parliament. In an accompanying resolution the Parliament presents a series of comments. These comments concern the building policy of the institution as well as the operational expenditure of the Parliament. Firstly, the Parliament recalls that, following their recent revision, the Rules of Procedure now provide (with effect from the discharge procedure for the 2003 financial year) for discharge to be given to the President of the European Parliament, rather than the Secretary-General. It also takes the view that the scope of the discharge procedure should cover not only the management activities of the Parliament's Secretary-General and Administration but also the decisions taken by the Institution's governing bodies (President, Bureau and Conference of Presidents). Concerning the implementation of the budget, the Parliament notes the high level of implementation of the budget as evidence by the take-up rate (commitment) of available appropriations in the 2001 financial year (99,33% as against 99,28% in 2000). It notes that the main changes to the appropriations in the 2001 budget as originally adopted concerned rent and annual lease payments (173,79% increase intended to accelerate the financing of the LOW building in Strasbourg) and insurance (186,54% increase resulting from the need to conclude additional contracts following the cancellation by its insurers of existing cover in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001). As regards the places of work and buildings, the Parliament notes that 25 855 days per year are lost due to staff travel to Strasbourg; notes that this amounts to a cost for the taxpayer of EUR 3,9 million, and is the equivalent to the employment of 60 full time staff members per year. It requests that the figures presented in the report on the cost of Parliament's three places of work be adjusted to include this additional information and sent to the European Convention. It underlines that the forthcoming enlargement will result in an increase in the volume of Parliament's budget by 20 % and considers that the costs involved in maintaining three places of work are likely to follow the same trend and result in additional costs of about EUR 34 million. The loss of efficiency has been stressed for Members occasioned by travelling time. It accepts the view that any concentration of activities in one place of work would entail one-off infrastructure and staff removal costs. It admits that the decision on the meeting places of the Parliament has been laid down in the Treaty, but against the will of Parliament. The European Convention is urged to take due account of this study and to discuss the desirability of concentrating the activities of the European Parliament in one place. Concerning the buildings policy in Strasbourg, the Parliament regrets that the negotiations on the final investment cost of the LOW Building are still on hold pending the outcome of the action before the Court of Justice regarding the contractual completiondate and points to the uncertainty this creates for Parliament's budget planning. It recommends to the Bureau that it reconsider the proposal to build two new meeting rooms in Strasbourg and considers that a reconfiguration of the existing buildings could be sufficient to accommodate the arrival of new members after enlargement. With regard to the building policy in Brussels, the Parliament notes that since 15 January 2001 all the buildings in Brussels are now owned by Parliament following the capital injection made in previous years. More specifically, as regards the D4-D5 Ardenne, Parliament regrets that even after assurances given by Prime Ministers Martens and Dehaene the Belgian Government failed to make the sites concerned available to the Parliament but offered estate agents and developers the possibility of buying or acquiring an option to purchase property, for example by means of a purchase option agreement. This state of affairs presented the Parliament with a fait accompli and deprived it of the freedom to apply Community public procurement law in full. It considers that during the previous Parliamentary term, the European Parliament did not have a legal basis to justify reserving building land with a view to a possible enlargement of the European Union. The enlargement project was surrounded by great uncertainty and Parliament's Bureau was unable to take official decisions about enlargement until it

had the legal basis of the treaty of Nice and the confirmation of the Copenhagen European Council. As far as the security policy is concerned, Parliament approved the measures in force concerning stricter checks on access and better checks on visitors. It urges a stepping-up of the cooperation of national security services that is essential for the security of the buildings. Concerning the analysis of budgetary management, Parliament is pleased with the improvement made in the presentation and user-friendliness of its analysis of budgetary management. It believes, nevertheless, that further efforts can be made to inform readers in an easily understandable manner of the most significant features of expenditure for the year. It regrets that a document as important as the Parliament's annual accounts should be available only as a sub-section of a technical volume published by the Commission in one language. It asks the Secretary-General to report on the feasibility of publishing Parliament's "Compte de Gestion", including a further improved analysis of budgetary management. Concerning human resources, the Parliament notes that the rationalisation of human resources with a view to enlargement is linked to the proposals for an early retirement scheme for officials of Parliament and its political groups. It expects the release of officials eligible under this scheme to be conducted in a fully fair, transparent and non-discriminatory manner which also does not result in depriving Parliament of all its expertise at a stroke. Parliament supports the mobility policy and notes that some 118 A-grade officials (a little over 20 % of the total) have been subject to mobility in the three years of the scheme's operation, that mobility has become an accepted part of the culture of the Secretariat-General and that an essentially positive view of mobility is taken by those involved, both heads of service and officials subject to mobility. On the other hand, Parliamenttakes note of the criticism that the procedure is seen as excessively rigid, insists that a more individual-oriented approach, together with the development of a variety of human resources management tools, should lead to improvements as regards accompanying measures, particularly as regards professional training. It also believes that the rate of mobility should be increased for younger members of staff. Parliament stresses that the persistent problem of the excessively low number of women in high grades and the lack of progress in this area should not obscure the progress made over the past three years in the areas of working conditions, social infrastructure and raising awareness among the hierarchy. Parliament remains concerned at the lack of transparency in the appointment procedure to senior posts in Parliament and considers that the concern to safeguard the privacy of applicants is not justified by the lack of openness in the procedure. It calls for the names of all successful applicants for senior positions (A1, A2, A3) in the secretariat of Parliament and its political groups to be published on the noticeboards and in the internal bulletin of the Institution. It instructs its Secretary-General to publish the lists of successful candidates in open and internal competitions. Concerning Members' assistants, Parliament reiterates that it is absolutely vital that the rights of assistants working for Members should be safeguarded, including appropriate insurance and social security. It considers that the best way of doing this is through the adoption of the Statute for assistants. Regarding, Members' allowances, Parliament notes with concern the increasing number of Members registering their attendance during 'yellow' weeks, amounting to a cost of EUR 372 675, and underlines the point that yellow weeks were originally instituted as an important time for Members to connect with the constituencies which they represent. Lastly, as far as information policy is concerned, Parliament reiterates its request that the Parliament should hold an annual debate on EU information policy before the budget guidelines for the following financial year are established.