

2000 discharge: EC general budget, European Parliament

2001/2103(DEC) - 10/04/2002 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted, by 337 votes for, 97 against and 78 abstentions, the report by Kyösti Tapio VIRRANKOSKI (ELDR, FIN) which approves the Parliament's accounts for the year 2000, thus granting discharge in respecting the management of the 2000 budget. (Please refer to the previous text). In its resolution, the Parliament brings attention to a certain number of weaknesses in relation to the implementation of the budget. It calls for the accounts to be presented in a more user-friendly form. It instructs the Secretary-General to submit a working document on the feasibility and overall implications of revising the presentation of Parliament's accounts to its Committee on Budgetary Control by 1 July 2002. More specifically, as regards the implementation of the budget, the Parliament recognises that the generally favourable picture with regard to the take-up rate is distorted by the systematic recourse to the end-of-year mopping-up transfer which in recent years has been used to collect appropriations available throughout Parliament's budget in order to make capital injections by way of early repayment of the amounts due in respect of the Institution's buildings. As far as the management is concerned, Parliament's commitment to establish an independent internal audit service is underlined and it is stressed that the service must be independent with the possibility of communicating directly to the President of the Parliament when issues of gravity come to the attention of the internal auditor. With regard to the staff policy, the Parliament regrets the low proportion of women in positions of responsibility and it requests the Secretary-General to reflect on this shortage and seek to strike a balance between men and women. An important issue relates to the places of work and buildings, the resolution notes that even the variable costs of an ordinary five-day session in Strasbourg are about 33% higher than in Brussels in addition to other, much higher costs due to buildings, hotel expenses etc. Parliament instructs its Secretary-General to provide the Convention with a detailed analysis of the cost of maintaining three places of work. It has been observed that reducing the length of a Strasbourg part-session from 5 to 4 days, cutting it by one eighth, produces a derisory level of savings (0.97% of the total cost of the meeting). Parliament firmly stresses that the issue of the investment cost of the new LOW building in Strasbourg has to be solved immediately, and calls on the main partners and main shareholders of the promoter of the building, the city of Strasbourg and the Alsace Region to contribute in solving this issue; regrets that the Parliament has had to refer to the European Court of Justice to settle the dispute on the contractual completion date of the LOW building. In addition, Parliament points out that according to the relevant Bureau rules the reports by the political groups on their utilisation of appropriations for 2000 are in the public domain and recalls that the relevant Bureau rules empower the Committee on Budgetary Control each year to draw up a report on the basis of the statements of income and expenditure, the balance sheet and auditor's certificate forwarded by the political groups. Parliament notes that there is a tension between the necessity of separating the responsibilities of Parliament's administration and those of the political groups on the one hand and the Financial Regulation on the other which does not explicitly provide for any such separation. Parliament instructs the Bureau to ensure that Parliament's implementing rules of the Financial Regulation include a provision identifying the specific status of political groups so that their particular responsibilities can be clearly and properly regulated. Parliament also believes that the status and contractual arrangements related to parliamentary assistants need to be clarified through the establishment of a statute for this category of staff. It considers that such a statute should provide an exemption for service providers hired to carry out specific and time-limited tasks. Members should remain responsible for the appointment, category of remuneration and dismissal of their personal staff but it should be the Parliament's administration that must take overall responsibility for the administrative and contractual arrangements related to remuneration and social security. Finally, Parliament points to the relatively meagre budgetary resources allocated to information and Communication (EUR 25 million in 2000, representing only 2.5% of the total budget for the Parliament) and recommends the consequent need for an appropriate increase in budgetary resources for this sector. Parliament also suggests that the

Parliament's public website (EUROPARL) be managed by DG III (Parliament) which would constitute a more efficient use of resources.