2002 Discharge: European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

2003/2246(DEC) - 21/04/2004 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted the report by Jan MULDER (ELDR, NL) concerning the granting of discharge to the Director of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, in respect of the implementation of its budget for the financial year 2002. The Parliament records its comments in the accompanying resolution. These comments concern, in particular, the improvement of financial management. Firstly, as regards the implementation of the budget, Parliament reiterates the view, expressed in its 2003 resolution accompanying the discharge for 2001, that it expects the Agency to do its utmost to improve the programming of its activities in order to reduce the large amount of carry-overs. It stresses that, despite the apparent divergence of views between the ECA and the Agency as to the latter's efforts to observe the annuality principle, it nevertheless insists that further efforts should be made to reduce the amount of carry-overs through tighter programming of operational activities, even if these involve a life cycle of projects that exceed the financial year. It expects to be further informed by the Agency, in this respect, on its analysis of options offered by the new Financial Regulation framework in order to reconcile a proper implementation of the programmes while, at the same time, observing to the principle of the annuality of the budget. Concerning, the system of internal control, Parliament notes the Agency's plan to improve its system of internal control, involving the possible setting up of an Internal audit capability, and the initiatives it announced for implementing, in 2004, the internal control standards and it expects to be informed on these matters by the Agency once it has completed its internal procedures. On the issue of legality and regularity of the underlying transactions, the Parliament notes the lack of controls carried out on the beneficiaries under the SMEs funding scheme, in particular as regards the veracity of declared expenditure. The Agency is invited to use the "lessons learned" in managing the 2002 SME funding scheme to ensure greater rigour and better value for money in subsequent schemes. It invites the Agency to forward to its competent committees the external evaluation report of the second SME funding scheme by September 2004 and to provide information on the follow-up to the evaluation report for 2001-2002; In parallel, the Parliament has made a series of horizontal points on all of the Agencies' discharges which can be summarised as follows: - Internal audit and control measures : Parliament reiterates the position taken in its resolutions 2003 accompanying the discharge given to the Agencies for 2001 as regards the implementation of the new Financial Regulation and invites the Commission and the Agencies to continue their cooperation, in particular in the areas of accounting, internal audit, management and control procedures, so as to ensure that a coherent harmonised framework for the functioning of the Agencies is established. It recalls that it expressed concern in the discharge resolution for 2001 concerning the lack of controls on the agencies carried out by the internal audit service of the Commission (IAS). Parliament expresses grave concern that such controls do not seem to have been carried out this year. It stresses that it is essential thatthe Agencies be required to submit to the investigative powers of OLAF under the same conditions as the other institutions. - Financial Management : Parliament invites the Agencies to better explain their analysis and to indicate in particular which of their activities of a multi-annual nature might be financed by such appropriations. The Commission is invited to present its position on such a solution and, should it consider that this solution is not feasible, to outline alternatives allowing for a substantial reduction in carry-overs. - Review of the agencies : the Parliament states that that, prior to any decision to set up an agency, the Commission must make a rigorous analysis of the need for and added value of the functions that the agency will perform, with an eye to the principles of subsidiarity, budgetary rigour and procedural simplification. Like last year, the Commission is called upon to make a general study of activities currently carried out by various Community bodies that might overlap or serve the same goals, and to propose appropriate solutions, including the possible mergers of agencies. Parliament is concerned by the fact that there is an imbalance between administrative and operational expenditure in many Agencies, with administrative expenditure exceeding expenditure for operational purposes. The Commission and the Agencies are called upon to set

targets and a timetable to reduce the level of administrative expenditure as a proportion of total expenditure. The Agencies are encouraged to : - improve cooperation between themselves in order to meet their needs in specific areas (for example, software development) and reduce costs, rather than adopt solutions which were initially designed for the purposes of the Commission but which often prove to be too cumbersome and complicated for the Agencies' specific needs; - organise and develop a close working relationship with the competent parliamentary committees; invites its standing committees with competence in the areas of activity of each of the Agencies to co-ordinate their action with the Committees of Budgets and Budgetary Control, with a view to ensuring efficient monitoring of the activity of the Agencies. - New sources of financing : Parliament calls on the Commission and the Agencies to come forward with constructive proposals with regard to further development of new sources of additional financing, which would increase the level of self-financing. It welcomes the financial contributions of some Member States and regions to the agencies located on their area and considers it important for Council and the Commission to demand such contributions, especially when new agencies are set up. - Harmonised operating framework : Parliament recalls its that the multitude of different forms in the existing agencies' structures was thought to be "neither transparent nor comprehensible. Therefore, it has invited the Commission to present appropriate proposals, aimed at creating such a harmonised framework for the agencies, prior to or at least in parallel with the presentation of the legislative proposals for the new agencies; insists that an interinstitutional agreement spelling out common guidelines is a pre-condition for creating the harmonised framework. - Staff policy : the Parliament considers that the staff policy of the Agencies should comply with the Financial Regulation, the Staff Regulations and the best practice generally followed by theInstitutions. The Parliament recalls the principle that the Agencies should as far as possible employ staff on temporary contracts, in order to maintain flexibility and efficiency. In this respect, it is concerned about the serious anomalies detected in connection with the selection procedures of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and that selection procedures organised by the Agencies should meet the same standards as those organised by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) and that they should not be perceived as a backdoor for easy entry into the European civil service. Lastly, the Commission is invited to make proposals in order to ensure that the Agencies benefit from appropriate support from the EPSO when organising selection procedures and that there is a mechanism in place to validate the outcome of such procedures externally before recruitment takes place.