2002 Discharge: European Environment Agency

2003/2245(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 Environment Agency, in respect of the implementation of its budget for the financial year 2002. The Parliament records its comments in the accompanying resolution. Firstly, as regards the implementation of the budget - audit and control, Parliament notes the Agency's reply to the questionnaire concerning carry-overs and in particular its position concerning the multi-annual nature of several of its projects; invites the Agency therefore to explain further its analysis of the options offered by the new Financial Regulation, in particular the use of differentiated appropriations in the case of agreements with the European Topic Centres with a view to reducing carry-overs and better complying with the annuality principle. Parliament welcomes the establishment by the Agency of an internal audit capability but stresses the importance of cooperation with the Commission's Internal Audit Service. It reiterates its calls to the Agency to implement rapidly the measures needed to support the decentralised filing and archiving system with a view enabling the financial departments to better monitor the Agency's activities and programmes. On the issue of legality and regularity of the underlying transactions, the Parliament is deeply concerned by the repeated criticism voiced by the ECA as regards the deficiencies in the documents supplied in support of requests for payments. It expects the Agency to take swift action to remedy this problem and to report to Parliament's competent committee once the filing, archiving and mail registration system is up and running. Furthermore, it notes the Agency's undertaking given in the replies to the questionnaire that no further grant agreements with international bodies will be established in future and that they will be restricted to the specific context of the EEA Regulation and the new Financial Regulation. It notes also the Agency's clarification as regards facilities offered to the Royal Awards Foundation and in particular that the latter has paid, since 1 January 2003, the cost of the office which it occupies at the Agency's premises. It notes the Agency's intention to cease hosting the Foundation; expects nonetheless the Agency to take stock of the ECA's observations so as to avoid similar criticism being voiced again in the future. 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 that the Agencies be required to submit to the investigative powersof 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 the Institutions. The Parliament recalls the principle that theAgencies 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.