2002 discharge: EC general budget, Council

2003/2212(DEC) - 21/04/2004 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

In adopting the report by Gabriele STAUNER (EPP-ED, D), the European Parliament has voted to grant discharge to the Secretary-General of the Council in respect of the implementation of the budget for the 2002 financial year (operational expenditure). In an accompanying resolution, the Parliament underlines the need for a more comprehensive exchange of information between the Council and the European Parliament and welcomes therefore the Council's readiness to hold an informal dialogue between the two Institutions prior to the discharge procedure. It is pointed out that the Committee on Budgetary Control asked the Council to forward the following documents to it: a list of contracts concluded with third parties, the complete documentation for the contract with the largest financial impact, the provisions governing the use of official cars, and the Financial Controller's reports. Parliament notes, and finds unacceptable, the reply given by the chairman of the Committee of Permanent Representatives on 11 December 2003 to the questionnaire sent by the Committee on Budgetary Control on 26 November 2003: 'The questions raised in your questionnaire under the heading General Questions to all Institutions are not directly related to the accounts of the Council over the year 2002 or to the annual report of the Court of Auditors concerning that year. The Council's position is that these questions go beyond the scope of the discharge procedure'. Furthermore, Parliament notes that the Court of Auditors' annual report for 2002 contains general comments on administrative expenditure by the Community institutions, but no specific comments whatever on the Council's budget. It welcomes the announcement by the Court of Auditors that its next annual report will contain comments on administrative expenditure for each Community institution. Parliament stresses that its request for information to the Council is fully in line with the provisions of the Financial Regulation (in particular Articles 146 and 182). The Council is called upon to respond to the questionnaire submitted by the Committee on Budgetary Control no later than 1 July 2004. Moreover, Parliament notes that as from next year the Council will forward to the European Parliament a report summarising the number and type of internal audits carried out, the recommendations made and the action taken on those recommendations. Parliament requests information on the measures taken by the Council in 2002 to improve the analysis of its financial management. It points out that in 2001 there were differences between the physical and accounting inventories and asks whether that shortcoming has been rectified. Lastly, it would like the Court of Auditors to pay appropriate attention to verifying financial management and the inventory within the Council's 2003 budget. It also welcomes the joint declaration by the Council, the Commission and Parliament of 25 November 2002 on the prior notification of Parliament in the decision-taking process on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and asks how this has been reflected in practical cooperation. It draws attention to the recommendation by the Court of Auditors in its Special Report No 13/2001 on the management of the Common Foreign and Security Policy on the basis of its audit findingsthat Parliament, the Council and the Commission should lay down clear operational principles and rules at interinstitutional level with regard to the role of the Commission and of the Council in CFSP implementation and that the financing of CFSP actions should be made more transparent.