2002 discharge: EC general budget, Committee of the Regions

2003/2216(DEC) - 21/04/2004 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

In adopting the report by Gabriele STAUNER (EPP-ED, D), the European Parliament voted to grant the Secretary-General of the Committee of the Regions discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget for the 2002 financial year. In an accompanying resolution, Parliament notes that in its report concerning the financial year 2002 the Court of Auditors established the same irregularities as the Anti-Fraud Office. It also points out that Parliament did not grant the Committee of the Regions discharge in respect of financial management in 2001 until 29 January 2004 and, in the resolution accompanying the discharge decision, called on the Committee of the Regions 'to provide a full report on the current discharge decision in good time for it to be taken into account in the context of the discharge procedure for the 2002 financial year'. The setting up of working groups is welcomed, with the involvement of staff of the institution and an external advisor, to examine and propose solutions to the various structural, administrative and financial problems. Parliament remains however to be convinced that they will lead to significant improvements as long as the administrative culture remains the same; points out that, following the example of the Commission in the Eurostat affair, a root and branch overhaul of senior management, working methods and respect for internal audit is essential to create a climate of reform and renewal. It awaits confirmation that the Committee has strengthened its internal audit unit with the A7 and B5 posts agreed by Parliament and seeks a justification for any further delay in recruitment procedures. Parliament expresses its general surprise at the dismissal of the OLAF findings and recommendations and suggests that real reform can only begin by acknowledging past mistakes and weaknesses. The Committee of the Regions is criticised for failing to replace the staff of the Financial Controller or to give him the necessary information to carry out an audit report in 2002. The European Parliament welcomes in this connection the Bureau's decision of 10 February 2004 to bring its "whistleblowing" provisions into line with rules currently in force in the Commission which make it possible for officials to turn to a body outside their Institution, so as to ensure that their anonymity remains intact. It is also noted that such a doctrine is only truly effective if staff members are aware of it. It also encourages the Committee of Regions to ensure that this information is freely available to its staff. Parliament highlights that on 18 November 2003 the President of the Committee of the Regions called on the acting Secretary-General to clarify whether disciplinary proceedings ought to be instituted against staff. It criticises the fact that, on the one hand, the administrative inquiry is not to be concluded until April, but that, on the other, the Administration has already been able to establish that the Internal Auditor has not been intimidated or harassed at all. Parliament notes that the Committee of the Regions introduced a new staff policy in 2003 and will return to this in its discharge report for the 2003 financial year. Lastly, Parliament notes that the Committee of the Regions spent some EUR 100 000 on studies in 2002 and asks how the topics were selected and to what use the studies were put and asks whetheran assessment was made of their usefulness.