

2003 discharge: EC general budget, European Parliament

2004/2041(DEC) - 12/04/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted the resolution drafted by Ona **JUKNEVICIENE** (ALDE, LT) recommending that the President of Parliament be granted the budgetary discharge for 2003. It noted that in 2003 98.98 % of the appropriations entered in Parliament's budget were committed with a cancellation rate of 1.02 % and that as in previous years a very high level of budget implementation was achieved. Without calling into question Parliament's settled policy of buying rather than renting its buildings, Parliament felt that this high level of implementation is partly attributable to the consistent practice since 1992 of the "ramassage" (mopping-up transfer) for the purposes of transferring any appropriations available at year end to the budget lines for buildings and, in particular, for advance payments of capital to reduce future payments of interest. It recognised that the greater part of Parliament's property acquisition programme has already been completed, but urged the budgetary authorities to ensure optimum budgetary forecasting and that the amounts entered in the draft budget reflect Parliament's real requirements rather than resorting systematically to significant transfers from unrelated budget lines.

Parliament moved on to point out that much of the management activity of the Institution in 2003 was geared to adjusting to the new requirements of the Financial Regulation, setting up new systems, methodologies and working methods, devising training programmes and establishing new lines of responsibility. It noted that the Court praised Parliament's efficiency in putting the new structures in place. Parliament recognised that the transition from a highly centralised to a decentralised approach to internal control procedures in a short space of time represented a major challenge in 2003, and noted that of the smaller institutions, Parliament - thanks to the efforts of its Administration - was one of the few to have succeeded in adopting the necessary subsidiary texts in time for the entry into force of the new Financial Regulation on 1 January 2003.

With regard to the general expenditure allowance, Parliament requested the Quaestors to review the general rules for reimbursement of allowances to see if changes are required to be able to maximise the use of new IT capabilities. On secretarial assistance allowance, it noted that Bureau adopted amendments to the rules governing the secretarial allowance intended, inter alia, to ensure greater consistency between the rules and the requirements of the Financial Regulation.

On the Member's voluntary pension scheme, Parliament noted that according to the latest revised actuarial valuation dated 31 December 2003, the fund's future liabilities at that date exceeded its current assets by EUR 41 795 982 and that the actuarial funding level at the end of 2003 was 76.4%. It recalled the view of the Court of Auditors that there should be clear rules established in the scheme to define the liabilities and responsibilities of the European Parliament and of the Members of the scheme if a future actuarial valuation were to indicate a deficit. It was necessary to clarify precisely the nature of Parliament's liability vis-à-vis future financial obligations linked to the pension fund. Furthermore, Members' contributions to the Fund should be deducted from a personal source rather than the parliamentary allowance system. Parliament felt that, as soon as the Statute for Members is approved, a new and separate pension instrument, equal for all Members, should be set up and that from that date all contributions from Parliament's budget to a voluntary pension fund should stop. It expressed concern at the view taken by the Court of Auditors that if the present scheme were to continue, a sufficient legal basis (other than a Bureau decision) had to be created as soon as possible, and that Parliament's financial contribution to the voluntary pension scheme should be based on an act of secondary legislation adopted in conformity with Article 190(5) of the Treaty.

Finally, on the matter of buildings, Parliament noted that the long-running dispute between Parliament and the French authorities over the final purchase price of the Strasbourg LOW building was resolved at the end of 2003 and that purchase was completed in 2004. It recalled that the absence of a single working place resulted in significant extra costs for Parliament's budget. The cost of siting the European Parliament in three countries is put at more than EUR 200 million per year.