2004 discharge: EC general budget, Economic and Social Committee ESC

2005/2095(DEC) - 27/04/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted by Nils **LUNDGREN** (IND/DEM, SE) and granted the Secretary-General of the European Economic and Social Committee discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget for the financial year 2004. In its accompanying statements, Parliament noted that in 2004 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) administered a budget of EUR 103 000 000 with a utilisation rate of 88.56 % (2003: 98.12 %).

Parliament recalled the EESC's assurance given in 2004 that there had been no further irregularities whatsoever with regard to the payment of its Members' travel expenses. However, the Court of Auditors referred in its annual report on the 2003 financial year, published in November 2004, to three cases in which the travel allowance paid to Members was twice the amount set out in the Committee's own rules. Parliament noted that the Belgian prosecution service had opened a formal investigation based on a finding by OLAF of strong prima facie evidence that up to EUR 45 000 in expenses was wrongfully claimed by an EESC Member over a six-year period. Parliament was aware that the EESC voted to lift the immunity of the Member concerned and that a judgment of the competent Belgian court is expected before the end of 2006.

Parliament went on to note that in 2004 the EESC changed its internal rules so as to designate a vice-president to be responsible for budgetary matters and for relations with Parliament. It welcomed the fact that the EESC had forwarded the annual activity report and pointed to the following findings arising from the annual activity report:

- the increase in the number of Members from 222 to 317 (an increase of 42,79 %) following enlargement on 1 May 2004;

- the closure and replacement of the imprest account office from 1 January 2004 with direct processing of payment orders in the Si2 computer programme;

- an increase in translation requests of 33,5 % in comparison with 2003;

- a 35% increase in the number of meetings;

- problems with NAP as well as difficulties in recruiting all staff needed in 2004.

On buildings policy, Parliament said that the Court of Auditors should carry out an audit on the Montoyer building renovation in addition to the audits pending on the buildings shared by the CoR and the EESC. It concluded that renting buildings would significantly reduce the risks involved for small institutions and that this solution should be considered as a serious alternative for future building projects.

Finally, it welcomed the fact that the annual activity report included the results of ex-post controls in accordance with Article 52 of Commission Regulation 2342/2002/EC on the implementation of the Financial Regulation, and said that in this respect the EESC's example could be usefully followed by other institutions.