2005 discharge: EC general budget, European Parliament

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PURPOSE : to present the Court of Auditors' report on the implementation of the 2005 budget (other institutions – European Parliament).

CONTENT : in its 29th Annual Report on the implementation of the general budget of the European Union, the Court highlights that 2005 was the first full year in which the European Union had 25 Members. The Court's audit did not reveal any material errors concerning the legality and regularity of underlying transactions.

Supervisory and control systems: in 2005 all the Institutions had supervisory and control systems complying with the requirements of the new Financial Regulation. However, some Institutions had not fully implemented all their Internal Control Standards (in particular the Council).

Also in 2005, the NAP (Nouvelle Application Paie), a computer application for calculating staff remunerations created in 2003 and managed by the Commission Paymaster Office (PMO), was being used by all the Institutions. The technical weaknesses noted in 2004 were overcome, minimising the risk of erroneous calculation of the various elements of staff remuneration. However, the institutions did not systematically use the reporting facilities of NAP in order to verify, before the final pay run, all the data concerning situations specific to individual members of staff. Although not mandatory pursuant to the Financial Regulation, ex-post controls would increase the reliability of the administrative procedures for managing staff remunerations and help to uncover possible weaknesses and errors in the system.

Staff Regulations: the amended Staff Regulations, which entered into force on 1 May 2004, state that accommodation costs incurred on mission are reimbursed up to a maximum fixed for each country. Contrary to this rule, all the Institutions, except the Court of Justice, the Court of Auditors and the Ombudsman, provided in their internal rules for the payment of a flat-rate sum, ranging from 30 to 60 % of the maximum allowable amount, to staff who do not produce any evidence of having incurred accommodation costs. After the publication of the European Court of Auditors' Annual Report concerning the financial year 2004, the European Economic and Social Committee amended its internal rules in December 2005 in order to ensure compliance with the Staff Regulations.

Specific remarks concerning the European Parliament: to recall, Parliament administrative expenditure totalled EUR 1.235 billion in 2005, representing a 3.82% increase over 2004. The Court states that weaknesses were observed, as in the past, in the supervisory and control systems relating to the payment of allowances to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). The rules governing the payment of assistance allowances were modified by the Bureau (a body consisting of the Parliament's President and 14 Vice-Presidents) in 2004. New provisions were introduced regarding the submission of supporting documents by MEPs. The obligations resulting from the new provisions were clarified and explained to the MEPs by a Quaestors' communication of July 2005 requiring the Members to present documentary evidence of the use of their allowance by 1 November 2005. At the end of November, less than 20 % of the documents required had been submitted. In January 2006, the Quaestors extended the deadline to 17 March 2006. The amended rules were thus not adequately implemented in 2005, and payments to providers of services or payments to assistants through paying agents were still not based on appropriate supporting documents, such as invoices paid by the MEP and detailed justifications of the expenses of the paying agent.

General conclusions: the Court states that improvements have been made by all the Institutions in order to adapt their supervisory and control systems to the requirements of the new Financial Regulation. The Court's audit found that, notwithstanding the weaknesses mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the supervisory and control systems were adequate to manage the risk as regards legality and regularity of the transactions underlying the accounts of the Institutions' administrative expenditure. The Court's audit did not reveal material errors affecting the legality and regularity of the administrative expenditure.