2005 discharge: EC general budget, Council

2006/2072(DEC) - 24/04/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted Daniel **CASPARY** (EPP-ED, D), by 583 votes for, 68 against and 28 abstentions, and granted the Council's Secretary-General discharge for implementation of the Council budget for the financial year 2005. Having done so, it set out its observations in the accompanying resolution.

Parliament began by noting that in 2005 the Council had available commitment appropriations amounting to a total of EUR 588 182 64052 with a utilisation rate of 96.69 %. Following the introduction of accrual accounting with effect from 1 January 2005 the Council's financial statements disclose a positive economic out-turn of EUR 19 386 89140 and identical amounts (EUR 398 520 00403) of assets and liabilities. Parliament regretted that unlike other institutions, the Council does not submit an annual activity report to the European Parliament, citing the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1970 and the absence of any corresponding requirement in the Financial Regulation. It called on the Council to reconsider this decision in order to be more accountable to the general public and taxpayers.

With regard to the Council’s financial management, Parliament indicated that that, while the Council's reformed system for reimbursing the travel expenses of delegates of Council Members had greatly reduced the administrative burden, there were insufficient checks on the validity of Member States' statements before payment of the July 2005 instalment. The internal auditor stressed the need for more transparency as to the eligibility of meetings and refundable expenses. Parliament noted that the Council Secretariat is currently reviewing the system, and that each delegation now receives from the Council Secretariat a limited budget with a ceiling.

At the same time, Parliament recalled that the Council was unwilling to reply officially to a questionnaire to all the institutions (including the European Parliament) concerning the use of official cars having regard to the terms of the Gentlemen's Agreement. In view of its age and the substantial shortfall between words used and the meaning or interpretation which is attributed to them, Parliament felt that the Gentlemen's Agreement might be in need of revision.

It went on to observe that, in its special report No 9/2006, the ECA found that the cost per page of translation at the Council was EUR 276 (as against EUR 194 at the Commission and EUR 119 at the European Parliament). This difference was partly explained by the Council Secretariat's success in reducing the number and length of documents sent for translation and establishing a list of core documents.

Lastly, Parliament called for maximum transparency in the area of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and asked the Council to ensure that no operating CFSP expenditure appears in the Council's budget. It reserved the right to take the necessary steps, where appropriate, if the agreement is infringed.

It should be noted that the amendments proposed by the Greens/ALE group were rejected in Plenary.