

European Parliament Resolution on the resignation of the Commission (23 May 1999)

Caption: European Parliament Resolution of 23 March 1999 on the resignation of the Commission and the appointment of a new Commission.

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European Parliament Resolution on the resignation of the Commission and the appointment of a new Commission (23 March 1999)

B4-0327, 0328, 0329, 0330, 0331, 0332 and 0333/99

The European Parliament,

— having regard to the first Report by the Committee of Independent Experts on the allegations of fraud, mismanagement and nepotism in the Commission,

— having regard to the decision of the President and the Members of the Commission to resign from office,

A. whereas the European Parliament has consistently stressed, including in its resolution of 14 January 1999 on improving the financial management of the Commission ⁽¹⁾, the need to combat fraud and ensure better and more responsible administration of the EU budget; recalling the findings of the Court of Auditors and the Committee of Budgetary Control,

B. whereas the Commission has withheld important documents from Parliament (Article 206 (future Article 276) of the EC Treaty),

C. whereas following publication of the Report, which indicated a generalised lack of accountability, the Commission resigned in accordance with President Santer's earlier commitment,

D. convinced that a strong European Union inevitably requires a strong Commission which is capable of acting in an efficient and transparent manner,

1. Acknowledges the first report by the Committee of Independent Experts and expresses its appreciation of the report and its substantial content and reasoning; notes its conclusions and takes note of the criticism of the lack of sense of responsibility and the loss of administrative and management control demonstrated by Commissioners individually and by the Commission as a body; takes note that the committee did not encounter cases where a Commissioner was directly and personally involved in fraudulent activities;

2. Respects the decision by the Members of the Commission to resign as both necessary and proportionate to the nature and scale of the criticism contained in the conclusions of the Committee of Independent Experts' report and as an act which recognises the need for political responsibility and democratic accountability;

3. Following the report and its conclusions, calls on the Commission to re-examine the case of Paul Van Buitenen;

4. Looks forward to the second report by the Committee of Independent Experts containing a more wide-ranging review of the Commission's culture, practices and procedures and in particular its concrete recommendations for strengthening these procedures and any other appropriate reforms to be considered by Commission and Parliament; this report should deal amongst other issues with procedures in existence for the awarding of financial contracts and of contracts for interim or temporary staff to implement programmes, with procedures for following up allegations of fraud, mismanagement and nepotism (detection and treatment), and with the treatment by the Commission of cases of fraud, mismanagement and nepotism, involving staff; this report must be finished by the beginning of September 1999;

5. Considers that the institutional crisis represents an opportunity to reinforce the political and democratic dimension of the EU, by strengthening the accountability of the Commission to Parliament and by offering the chance to build a new, strong, politically responsible and efficient Commission;

6. Notes that the principle of collegiality remains important but believes that it should not exempt individual Commissioners from the consequences, not only of any personal wrongdoing, but also of any incompetent or negligent management of their own areas of responsibility; further believes that the report of the

Committee of Independent Experts strongly establishes the case for individual executive responsibility as the basis for a stronger, independent and political Commission founded on the principle of democratic accountability;

7. Demands of the Council that a procedure be laid down as soon as possible which enables individual Commissioners to be called to account;

8. Notes that in recommending budget discharge for 1996 the Council failed to assume its responsibilities as one of the two arms of the budget authority;

9. Regrets that on the very day of publication of the Committee of Independent Experts' report and conclusions the Council should recommend budget discharge for 1997 again without assuming its political responsibilities;

10. Calls on the European Council at its extraordinary meeting in Berlin to put forward, in collaboration with Parliament, a precise and reasonable calendar for dealing with the appointment of the new Commission and asks the governments of the Member States as a matter of urgency to put forward their candidate for the post of President of the Commission and subsequently for those of Commissioners; recalls that this Commission, in accordance with the Treaty, is appointed for the remaining period of the Commission's mandate, i.e. until the end of this year, and insists that the procedures laid down by the Amsterdam Treaty shall apply both to the approval of this Commission and to the Commission which will take office as from 1 January 2000;

11. Insists that the number of new women Commissioners increase substantially in the new College of Commissioners;

12. Insists that the Commission initiate an ambitious and thoroughgoing programme of radical reform of its financial management and financial control procedures and of its entire management culture with a view to establishing appropriate and better standards for the conduct of European affairs based on the principle of transparency;

13. Insists that the resignation of the Commission must not be used by the European Council as an excuse or reason for postponing a final and comprehensive decision regarding the Agenda 2000 package at its extraordinary meeting in Berlin;

14. Calls on the Member States to deposit their instruments of ratification relating to the Treaty of Amsterdam as soon as possible;

15. Calls on Member State governments to take decisive action in order to ensure that Parliament too is given the instruments to improve its credibility and accountability vis-à-vis public opinion, by finding an agreement on Parliament's proposal regarding a statute for its Members before the next European elections;

16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the European Council, the governments of the Member States and the national parliaments.

(1) Minutes of that Sitting, Part II, Item 1.