2009 budget: other sections

2008/2026B(BUD) - 13/10/2008

The Committee on Budgets unanimously adopted the report by Janusz **LEWANDOWSKI** (EPP-ED, PL) on the EU 2009 budget (other sections).

General Framework: the committee considers that the EU institutions, following its request that they present fully cost-based budget drafts corresponding to real needs. They also welcome the Council's approach of using a more targeted method for establishing the Draft Budget as opposed to the across-the-board percentage changes previously used.

They stress that, overall, there is still room for improvement and more effective use of budget resources in a number of areas such as interinstitutional cooperation, use of staff mobility and redeployment in order to keep increases in check and also demonstration of a solid grip on all expenses related to travel, allowances, translation, and especially building costs.

MEPs stress once again the importance of continuous parliamentary monitoring of the implementation of budgetary decisions, which is the base for the establishment of the annual budget. They are convinced that direct parliamentary control cannot but contribute to improving the quality of spending, to a more direct control of sound financial management and eventually to a re-focusing of financial support to political priorities.

On a financial basis, MEPs have decided to **leave a margin under heading 5**. They emphasise that this includes restoring a part of the reductions made by Council to the budget of the other institutions (excluding the Commission), but only in those cases where the specific needs of each one has been justified.

The report highlights the main points as regards each institution:

Section 1 - European Parliament: MEPs stresses that its political priorities as set out in its budgetary Guidelines and Estimates resolutions of 10 April 2008 and 20 May 2008 have guided the 2009 proposals in a spirit of budgetary rigour while safeguarding the political priorities set out. They consider that the outcome is fully in line with these objectives and, notably, also corresponds to the specific requirements related to 2009 as an election year for the Parliament and the challenges related to the new Statute for Members and to the change of term. MEPs stress that budgetary changes have been brought about by the suspension of the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, by the preparations for the implementation of the new Statute for Assistants, by updated forecasts for the Members' Statute and, also, by the rise in energy prices.

They recall that the overall level of its budget amounts to 19.67% of the authorised expenditure under heading 5 (administrative appropriations) of the multi-annual financial framework, i.e. it has been maintained below the self-imposed limit of 20%. They welcome the fact that this implies a further saving of EUR 900 000 million compared to its position in May 2008. At the conciliation meeting between the Bureau and the Committee on Budgets on 30 September 2008, major budgetary differences were negotiated and, in the main, resolved. However, MEPs note a few outstanding issues where no agreement could be reached, in particular as regards staffing policy. MEPS consider that it is necessary to optimally balance the distribution of human resources between core legislative activities, direct services to Members and administrative support functions, as well as making the underlying assumptions and priorities better understood. They welcome the analytical and detailed establishment plan presented.

Although MEPs are satisfied that the current proposals will contribute positively to enhancing Parliament's law-making capacities, including with regard to the issue of comitology, they maintain in reserve the appropriations related to a limited number of posts pending further analysis and clarification regarding the use, needs and optimal distribution of resources by the end of June 2009 at the latest.

MEPs are fully committed to a speedy launch of the Visitor's Centre but stress that some further work is still needed to arrive at a satisfactory and cost-effective solution. They decide to partially approve the requests at this stage, while being fully prepared to revisit this issue as soon as possible and after the necessary information has been provided.

MEPs recognise the needs of **political groups** in terms of staff resources in order to face increasing challenges and, in consequence, agree to provide a further 53 posts.

Given the very substantial amounts involved, MEPs consider that the budgetary authority needs to consider the financial constraints and rising costs of purchasing, maintaining and refurbishing **buildings** in the coming year. They ask the Bureau to submit a strategic plan by September 2009, before the 1st reading of the budget. In this light, cannot agree to an increased building reserve and decides to keep it at EUR 20 million. They also ask to receive a final report on the financial, administrative and legal implications related to the issue of asbestos and, as well, to the ceiling repair works necessary in Strasbourg.

As regards the **environment**, MEPs await the results of the study on the carbon footprint of the European Parliament, which should also include the question of CO2 off-setting schemes, as requested by Parliament. They state that efforts need to be stepped up to reduce travel where possible. On mobility management, MEPs express their wish for more information detailing public transport connections from and to the Parliament and encourage the use of public transport as an alternative to car use.

MEPs also make a number of comments as regards the following institutions:

Section IV - Court of Justice: MEPs recognise the importance of the new urgency procedure to be implemented by the Court, in which national courts are entitled to a reply within a much shorter deadline than was previously the case. They therefore approve the draft budget as concerns the 39 new posts in question. The Court is called upon to present an updated report on building works as a whole and its cost implications until 2013. MEPs consider that the development of the Court's normal operating budget, currently at a rate of about +2.5%, is far more encouraging and that, overall, the Court has made clear efforts to limit its expenditure growth for the 2009 exercise. They have decided to fix the general abatement rate at 3.5%, a level close to that which the Court itself is suggesting, and restores the corresponding appropriations.

Section V - Court of Auditors: MEPs welcome the proposed reinforcement of the Court's audit capacity and decide to provide the 20 associated posts in agreement with both the Court and the Council. They considers that the financing of the Court's building extension must be kept at the lowest cost possible for the taxpayer and therefore re-confirm the decision to pay for this directly through the budget, in four years, rather than masking the significantly higher costs that would result from a 25-year lease-purchase arrangement. They decide, in consequence, to frontload the maximum amount possible to the 2009 budget and, to this end, have approved an amount of EUR 55 million for this purpose.

Section VI - European Economic and Social Committee: MEPs have taken account of the Committee's concerns as regards appropriations available for staff and, considering the arguments advanced. They agree to adjust the general abatement rate to a level of 4.5%. They decide to create, in addition to the two new AD5 posts included in the Draft Budget, another two AST posts which had been rejected by the Council. MEPs also decide to place a portion of appropriations for travel and meeting expenses into reserve pending the provision by the Committee of a clear plan on how it intends to keep these costs in check.

Section VII - Committee of the Regions: MEPs take note of the fact that the Committee will need to recruit additional 'enlargement-related' staff and agrees to the new posts in the Council's draft budget. In addition to this, they can accept limited number of three further posts in order to boost its operational capacity in specific departments. They decide to introduce a general abatement rate of 4.5% noting that this is very close to the Committee's own requests while still representing a saving.

Section VIII - European Ombudsman: MEPs agree to the Council's draft budget on creating 3 new AD posts in order to strengthen the Ombudsman in dealing with an increasing number of admissible complaints. In addition to this, after hearing the Ombudsman, can also agree to 3 temporary AST posts.

Section IX - European Data Protection Supervisor: MEPs approve this section of the draft budget.