EP Rules of Procedure, Rule 116 and Annex II: Question Time

2013/2083(REG) - 18/02/2014 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Constitutional Affairs adopted the report by Zita GURMAI (S&D, HU) on the amendment of Parliament's Rules of Procedure with regard to parliamentary questions.

In June 2011 the Conference of Presidents revised the format for Question Time with the Commission, with a view to improving its quality and liveliness. The new format was foreseen to run for a trial period from September 2011 and be subject to an evaluation before any changes were made definitive.

At its meeting of 17 January 2013, the Conference of Presidents examined an evaluation report on the trial period drafted and presented by the Vice-President responsible, Mr Mcmillan-Scott, and decided to confirm the revised format of Question time.

The committee proposed to introduce a number of amendments to the Rules of Procedure. Besides Rule 116, Question Time, the report should cover Rules 117 and 118, Questions for Written Answer, because of the vicinity of the subjects involved and informed the President accordingly.

The main features of the modification are:

- Question Time with the Commission shall be held at each part-session for a duration of 90 minutes on one or more specific horizontal themes to be decided upon by the Conference of Presidents one month in advance of the part-session;
- the number of participating Commissioners should, as a general rule, be limited to two per session, with the possibility of including a third depending on the topic;
- the Conference of Presidents should in principle decide upon the specific topic for discussion a month in advance of the part-session concerned, with a view to ensuring the presence of the appropriate Commissioners;
- the regular 'catch the eye' system should be replaced by a ballot system and to evaluate this system at a later stage;
- questions are not submitted in writing in advance and no verification of their admissibility takes place except where questions are not directly related to the specific horizontal theme chosen;
- Annex II which establishes in great length guidelines for the verification of the admissibility of questions, supplementary questions and time-limits has been adapted to the new ballot system.

As regards the questions for written answer, the following clarifications have been made:

- each Member may submit a maximum of five questions per month;
- in justified cases of urgency, the President may request that a question be answered within three weeks;
- questions and answers shall be published on Parliament’s website;
- any Member may put a maximum of six questions per month for written answer to the European Central Bank;
- questions should fall exclusively within the limits of the competences of the institutions as laid down in the relevant Treaties and within the sphere of responsibility of the addressee, and be of general interest.