Guidelines for the 2026 budget - Section III

2024/2110(BUI) - 02/04/2025 - Parliament's opinion on budgetary estimates/guidelines

The European Parliament adopted by 441 votes to 73, with 10 abstentions, a resolution on general guidelines for the preparation of the 2026 budget, Section III - Commission.

Parliament is committed to ensuring that the 2026 budget, with its focus on strategic preparedness and security, economic competitiveness and resilience, sustainability, climate, and strengthening the single market, provides EU citizens with a robust ecosystem and addresses their priorities, thereby strengthening a socially just and prosperous Europe.

The resolution stressed that **additional investment** is needed in the areas of security and defence, research, innovation, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), health, energy, migration, as well as the protection of land and maritime borders, inclusive digital and green transitions, job creation and opportunities for young people. Members called for this to be accompanied by administrative simplification, as outlined in the Competitiveness Compass.

Investing in a strong, sustainable and resilient economy

Members are convinced that strong economic resilience and sustainability can be achieved in the Union by boosting public and private investment, strengthening innovation and supporting competitiveness, including by addressing the skills gap and encouraging increased industrial production in Europe.

The resolution called for: (i) an increase in **Horizon Europe** funding to enable researchers and businesses to bring new products to market and develop them; (ii) targeting aid to encourage public-private partnerships and making finance accessible to support SMEs; and (iii) accelerating the **digital and green transitions** and substantial investment in future digital infrastructure, including well-regulated artificial intelligence and cybersecurity.

A Union better prepared and able to respond effectively to crises

Parliament stresses the need to strengthen the Union's **security and defence** capabilities in order to create a genuine Defence Union and therefore called for an immediate increase and better coordination of Member States' defence spending. The Union's space programme also requires sufficient resources.

Faced with new internal and external security challenges, Members stressed the importance of proper implementation of the **Asylum and Migration Pact**, in compliance with international human rights law, the principles of solidarity and fair responsibility sharing. They recalled the essential role of the Integrated Border Management Fund, the Border Management and Visa Instrument (BMI) and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund in protecting external borders. Sufficient funding must be allocated to border protection capacities, as a fundamental part of a comprehensive migration policy.

The CAP and the Common Fisheries Policy must be supported to ensure food security and strengthen the Union's autonomy. The Commission is called upon to reduce administrative burdens while maintaining strict production standards and the obligation to implement Union legislation. Members called for sufficient resources to be allocated and direct payments to be protected to help farmers cope with the consequences of inflation, fuel costs, changes in global markets, and adverse climatic events.

Members stressed the EU's role in ensuring security of energy supply and assisting households, farmers, and businesses in mitigating price volatility. They called for additional investment in critical infrastructure

and connectivity. They also called for the LIFE programme to be allocated sufficient funds to finance **climate and environmental** projects and for increased budgetary flexibility to respond adequately to natural disasters in the EU.

Giving citizens more opportunities in a dynamic society

Parliament stressed the importance of investing in **health** (EU4Health, Horizon Europe). This requires building a more supportive healthcare system to address demographic challenges and an ageing population, investing in the fight against childhood illnesses, rare diseases, antimicrobial resistance, and mental health, and avoiding shortages of critical medicines.

It is also important to invest in **younger generations**, as key players in change and progress, and in their skills by giving them access to quality education. All students, without discrimination and in all EU Member States, should have access to the Erasmus+ programme. Additional investment is needed to modernise the EU's education systems.

Parliament called for the mobilisation of all relevant EU programmes, including Creative Europe, to fund, in 2026, actions that promote **inclusive digital and media literacy**, particularly for young people, combat disinformation, and tackle online hate speech and extremist content. The Commission is called upon to dedicate specific funds to prevent religious communities, particularly Christian and Jewish communities, from being targeted. Members also reaffirmed the indispensable role of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme in **promoting European values** and citizens' rights.

Members also called for **better management of European funds**, conditional on respect for the rule of law, and called for the rapid establishment of an inter-institutional body responsible for ethical standards applicable to members of institutions and advisory bodies.

A strong Union in a changing world

The EU must strengthen its presence on the international stage in the context of escalating global conflicts, geopolitical shifts, and foreign influence activities around the world. To achieve this, the EU needs sufficient resources to **respond to major crises in its neighbourhood** and around the world, given the reduction in international funding. The EU's role as a leading humanitarian actor must also be strengthened.

The war in Ukraine has disrupted the security environment. It is therefore important to strengthen citizens' security and achieve efficiency in the field of defence and strategic autonomy. Parliament welcomed the renewed commitment of the Commission and the Member States to work together to address Ukraine's pressing defence needs and continue to support the **Ukrainian economy**.

Highlighting the benefits of pre-accession funds, Members welcomed the implementation of the Growth Plan for the **Western Balkans** and called for the necessary funds to be mobilised to support Moldova's accession process.

Cross-cutting issues

Parliament underlined that the repayment of the European Union Recovery Instrument (EURI) borrowing costs is a legal obligation for the EU and therefore non-discretionary. These costs are volatile and depend on markets and disbursements. Parliament reiterated its support for the Commission's amended proposals for new own resources. It fully supported cohesion policy and called for increased support for vulnerable regions. It called for greater transparency, compliance with climate commitments, and the need to leverage efforts in tackling fraud.