1996 budget: section III

1995/2234(BUD) - 24/10/1995

The rapporteur recalled that Parliament's priorities had been set out at its April part-session. They were to promote more rigorous management of the Union's budget, to define the priorities on the basis of the principle of cost-effectiveness and to step up information activities in order to enhance the Union's image among the public. Mr ELLES also believed that the budgetary decisions should be respected, whether or not a legal basis existed. He compared this budgetary procedure to that of 1991. Parliament's desire for improved controls on the use of funds led it to place certain expenditure in reserve. He thus insisted that no amendments should be tabled on agricultural expenditure, in accordance with the agreement reached at the end of July. As regards structural spending, Mr ELLES considered that more substantial progress was required in improving the payment system. In the area of internal policies, he proposed an overall reduction in the amounts laid down by the Council and suggested placing in reserve a percentage of the funding intended for trans-European networks and decentralised agencies. As far as the environment was concerned, Mr ELLES proposed establishing a procedure that would take account of the environmental dimension in the use of appropriations. The rapporteur welcomed the launch of the PRINCE initiative (providing information to citizens) and the fact that for the first time the European Parliament was taking a clear position on the reduction in administrative expenditure. Speaking on behalf of the Council, Mr MARTINEZ ROBLES pointed out that it was essential to have solid legal bases for the release of funds. The President-in-Office was pleased with the cooperation between both budgetary authorities, which had resulted in an agreement on agricultural and administrative spending. As regards the latter, it was vital to maintain a significant margin so as to be able to react to fluctuations in the parity between the Belgian franc and the ecu. He shared Parliament's concerns regarding the environment. In addition, the Council wanted to see more uniform positions on a number of issues, such as the placing in reserve of the appropriations for decentralised agencies, which could lead to their failure. In the area of external policy, Mr MARTINEZ ROBLES emphasised the Union's cooperation with the Mediterranean countries; as far as the MEDA programme was concerned, he was certain that its legal basis would be adopted in due course. With regard to fisheries, he pointed out that the Council considered this expenditure to be compulsory and called on Parliament not to start a new quarrel when the Court of Justice had yet to give its ruling on the agricultural dispute of the previous year. Finally, according to the Council, the idea of using the reserve as a budgetary policy instrument would have to be studied before excessive use of this instrument diluted the political message that the budget should portray. Commissioner LIIKANEN welcomed the agreement on agricultural expenditure and on the new financial dimension of the European Union's information policy. Parliament's resolution at first reading seemed to confirm the tendency towards ensuring increasingly rigorous implementation of the budget. In this context, the Commission stressed the need for a legal basis, which was a precondition for any effective budgetary policy. Going back to the issue of the decentralised agencies, the Commissioner was worried about the problems that could arise after part of their budget was placed in reserve. On behalf of the PSE Group, Mr SAMLAND recalled Parliament's priorities for the internal and external policies: combating unemployment and implementing the programme for reconstruction and peace in the former Yugoslavia respectively. The CFSP should be the first pillar and not the second. Finally, Mr Samland regretted that the Council had not managed to develop interinstitutional cooperation taking account of Parliament's efforts in this area. Mr CHRISTODOULOU (EPP) considered that this was a difficult budget as resources were scarce, and he emphasised the need for controls on the use of resources. As far as the legal basis was concerned, he pointed out that it was essential to agree on satisfactory rules for the budgetary credibility of the Union. Mr DE PRIMA believed that support should be provided to small and medium-sized enterprises to promote job creation. He welcomed the Youth for Europe project, but complained about the rigidity of the budget for the trans-European networks, which penalised Italy, notably the MALPENSA project. According to Mr BRINKHORST (ELDR), the distinction between compulsory and non-compulsory expenditure was no longer an issue; Parliament's powers as co-legislator in the legislative procedure

should be reflected in the budget. He called on the Commission to introduce in the near future an eco-label for agricultural products and to present the PRINCE programme as soon as possible. Mrs ELMALAN (GUE/NGL) disputed the allocation of agricultural subsidies because it encouraged the set-aside of land and the departure of young farmers. She hoped that the free trade approach to agriculture would be curbed in order to combat excessive intensification and desertification. Mrs MULLER called in particular for more energetic environmental measures, especially research and development programmes aimed at achieving a sustainable economy. Mr DELL'ALBA (ARE) was concerned about the systematic strategy of placing funds in reserve, which did not facilitate transparency; he believed that the budgetary procedure should not be used to influence legislation. Mr FABRE-AUBRESPY stated that his group would vote against this budget. He criticised the large increase in expenditure, which, in the current context of unemployment and social crisis, would result in a 7.3% increase in France's contribution to the budget; he therefore called for a reduction in EU spending. He regretted that Parliament was seeking to extend its prerogatives and stated that the sole aim of the new line for information was to 'pull the wool over the public's eyes'. He again expressed his opposition to the reduction in appropriations for EP officials' missions to Strasbourg, since this decision, by reducing the presence in Strasbourg, would undermine the headquarters of the European Parliament.