EP Rules of procedure: general revision

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The committee adopted the second report by Richard CORBETT (PES, UK) on the general revision of Parliament's Rules of Procedures with a view to the start of Parliament's next term of office in 2004. The aim is to simplify the Rules and improve their internal consistency. Among other things, the committee proposed changes relating to political groups and in particular the composition of such groups. Whereas at present a political group must comprise Members from more than one Member State, with the minimum number required varying according to how many Member States are involved, the committee proposed a simpler rule to take account of EU enlargement while ensuring that groups retain a transnational character. It said that a political group should comprise Members elected in at least one fifth of the Member States and that the minimum number of members required to form a political group should be 16. The committee also adopted an amendment relating to early termination of office by an MEP. Under this proposal, the Conference of Presidents may, acting by a three-fifths majority of the votes cast, representing at least 3 political groups, propose to Parliament that it terminate the holding of office of the President, a Vice-President, a Quaestor, a Chairman or Vice-Chairman of a committee, a Chairman or Vice-Chairman of an interparliamentary delegation, or any other holder of an office elected within the Parliament, where it considers that the Member in question has been guilty of serious misconduct. Such a proposal must be approved by Parliament by a two-thirds majority representing a majority of its component Members. In another area, in order to 'enhance budgetary responsibility', the committee proposed that the financial consequences and compatibility of Parliament's reports should already be known before the vote in plenary. A report's explanatory statement should therefore include an assessment of the financial impact of the report. Regarding the right of every Member to speak his or her own language, the report proposed greater flexibility to reflect the post-enlargement situation, in which Parliament may have to deal with 22 languages even though some languages would be spoken by only a few Members. For plenary sittings, the proposed new version of Rule 117 states that speeches will be 'simultaneously interpreted into other official languages' of the EU instead of 'the other official languages' as at present. For committee meetings, interpretation will be provided only into the official languages actually being used. On the question of implementing provisions for Community legislation, Parliament may, within 3 months of the date of receipt of a draft implementing measure, object to the measure, notably if it exceeds the implementing powers provided for in the basic instrument. Where there is no part-session before this period expires, or in cases where urgent action is required, the right of response is delegated to the relevant parliamentary committee, which shall write to the Commissioner responsible. Other changes to the Rules proposed by the committee relate to: the organisation of Parliament's proceedings, including the appearance before Parliament of the President of the Commission, the Council and/or the High Representative for the CFSP; written questions, which could now be put to the ECB as well as the Council and Commission; the tabling of, and voting on, reports and amendments; explanations of vote (oral explanations to be allowed at most twice per MEP per sitting); the abolition of urgent debates, to be replaced by other arrangements; exceptional convening of Parliament in emergencies.