2000 budget : section III

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The report was adopted by the Committee. The general rapporteur, Mr BOURLANGES, highlighted the uncertainty hanging over the 2000 budget procedure, given that the present multiannual financing framework (1993-99), known as the Financial Perspective (FP), and the Interinstitutional Agreement (IIA) accompanying it are due to expire and an overall agreement on Agenda 2000 has yet to be reached. He believed, however, that the spirit of budgetary rigour and discipline which had prevailed in recent years should be maintained, although adequate funds must still be made available to carry out EU policies. He noted that in the absence of a new Financial Perspective the ceiling for the 2000 budget would be the same as the total amount provided for in the current FP for 1999, adjusted in accordance with the existing IIA. If the Council were to denounce the current IIA, Article 203 of the Treaty would have to be invoked (entailing a calculation of the maximum rate of increase from one year to the next and a requirement for Parliament and Council to reach an agreement on this rate). Mr Bourlanges stressed Parliament's determination to adopt a budget which would guarantee its prerogatives and take into account its policy priorities: job creation (especially via measures to support SMEs), continuing education and training, research and development and coherent development of the various regions of the EU. In addition, the budget must strengthen the Union in the world through effective external measures and a development policy which displays solidarity and consistency. Another priority is to abolish gradually the technical assistance bureaux which currently carry out work which should be done by the Commission. The report reaffirms, for the 2000 budget, the principles used by Parliament and Council to draw up the budget in recent years: rigour, applied to all categories of expenditure, in order to guarantee margins for manoeuvre, the use of quantitative and qualitative outturn statistics to determine the funds to be entered for the following year and the concentration of appropriations in order to comply with clear priorities. The EU budget must also take account of trends in national budgets. More checks should be carried out and the qualitative aspects of expenditure should be improved. For this purpose, closer cooperation is needed between Parliament's own committees and between the latter and national parliamentary committees. The report argues for keeping the system by which the Commission, fairly late in the budget procedure (October), makes an adjustment of the estimates for agricultural expenditure based on the latest data. For this category of spending, rigour is essential but it must be accompanied by sufficient resources. For Category 2 (Structural actions), the report stresses that a clear distinction must be made between appropriations for the new programming period (2000-2006) and those covered by the current package (1993-99). The committee calls for at least 50% of "outstanding commitments" from the present programming period to be included in the 2000 budget in order to "eliminate the burden of the past". This should apply to Categories 2, 3 (Internal policies) and 4 (External action). As regards Category 3 (Internal policies), priority should be given to public information measures, asylum and immigration policy and refugees, improved environmental measures, public health and consumer protection. In Category 4 (External action), after an assessment of measures which have been carried out, the emphasis should be on exploring, in conjunction with the Commission and Council, the scope for concentrating Community aid on the poorest developing countries and possibly increasing this aid. As regards expenditure for financing pre-accession measures, these should be grouped together under a single budget title. Lastly, on administrative expenditure, the report says it is essential to make the budget estimate of staff resources of the Community administration part of a multiannual assessment of requirements. It calls on the Commission to carry out a thoroughgoing revision of its management methods, to make administrative costs more transparent and to report by 30th June 1999 on its priorities and real needs in terms of staff.