2001 Budget: section III

1999/2190(BUD) - 21/03/2000

The committee adopted a report by Jutta HAUG (PES, D) on the 2001 budget which stated that employment policy was the first priority. The report also stressed the need to boost social and cultural policies as well as equal opportunities. A further key area was reconstruction in Kosovo and stabilisation of the Balkans. Europe needed to create conditions which would bring the peoples and countries of that region closer to the Union. To ensure adequate funding for such measures, the committee stressed that Parliament and Council must agree on a revision of the financial perspective. Parliament was opposed to having the funding for reconstruction in Kosovo taken from other external policy areas. The report also underlined the importance of implementing administrative reform of the Union to provide greater efficiency and transparency, to improve value for money and increase democratic scrutiny. For this to be achieved, the Commission's reform would have to be translated into action, while Parliament undertook to guarantee democratic oversight and the efficient use of taxpayers' money. The committee stressed that the budget must reflect the EU's policy objectives and be transparent and easy to understand. As regards the various expenditure categories, the report said that Category 1 (farm expenditure) should not be used as a principal source of funding for Category 4 (external action). Regarding Category 2 (structural operations) the committee called on the Commission and Member States to ensure that funds were not held up, so as to avoid the problem of unused expenditure which arose under the previous programming period (1993-99). On Category 3 (internal policies), the report was in favour of continuing efforts to boost jobs by creating synergy with measures financed under the Structural Funds. The committee also called for the new information technologies to be incorporated into the transeuropean networks. It wanted to see dialogue between both sides of industry to face up to economic globalisation. As regards the EU's own information policy, the institutions should continue their efforts and maintain a consistent approach if they were to bring the Union closer to its people. Appropriate funding was needed for the new EU policy areas created following Amsterdam: the fight against discrimination, social exclusion, racism, xenophobia and antisemitism, and also immigration and asylum policy measures, to promote economic prosperity and social cohesion. The committee wanted to see a legal basis and appropriate funding for the European refugee fund. Particular emphasis was placed on the need to support the culture industry in the context of structural measures, as this was an industry which could create jobs. As regards Category 4 (external action), pending the Commission proposal on the revision of the financial perspective the report insisted that the Commission should not enter into any financial commitments (e.g. at the next donors' conference on the Balkans) likely to arouse expectations, without first consulting the budgetary authority about ways of providing the funding in question. The report also called for close monitoring of expenditure on the common foreign and security policy, where spending had increased sharply in recent years. It recalled that funding for the TACIS programme must be placed in the reserve and said it should only be released if Russia complied with the principles laid down by Parliament and the Council regarding the conflict in Chechnya. On development policy, special attention should be devoted to efforts to eradicate poverty in the least developed countries.