2003 budget: other sections

2002/2005(BUD) - 10/10/2002

The committee adopted the report by Per STENMARK (EPP-ED, S) finalising its position for the first reading of the 2003 budget (Sections I, II, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII(a) and VIII(b)). In its general remarks, it welcomed the common approach agreed on between Parliament and Council whereby both sides had undertaken to observe the existing ceiling for heading 5 and not to use the flexibility instrument for this heading. It reiterated that preparing for enlargement remained Parliament's key priority for the 2003 budget. Noting that the Council had taken an 'across-the board' approach when making cuts in each section under heading 5, the committee said that it had decided to apply a strategy of re-entering appropriations to cover the most pressing needs in each section and offsetting them by other budgetary measures. Other points raised in the report included the need for a more in-depth examination of the scope for interinstitutional cooperation, the need to enter amounts in the reserve in the Parliament, Council and Commission sections to cover the work of the European Convention (which would continue beyond the end of 2002) and the need to establish a pension fund for EU officials. Turning to Section I (Parliament), the committee stressed that preparing Parliament for enlargement and for welcoming the new MEPs in 2004 was the key priority. Expressing the belief that negotiations with 10 applicant countries could be concluded by the end of 2002 and that new Member States could join the EU by 1 January 2004, it said that Parliament's 2003 budget must make provision for this scenario. It agreed to leave appropriations for this purpose in the "Enlargement reserve", pending political and administrative decisions to be taken. The committee further said that it remained committed to the principle of "controlled full multilingualism" after enlargement and to maintaining equality between languages. It also endorsed the proposal to move towards an externalisation rate of 50% for Parliament's translations. Other policy issues mentioned in the report included a call for Parliament to be brought closer to the citizens it represents and to improve its outreach, in particular with a view to the next elections. With this in mind, the committee also wanted to see the development of internet broadcasting of plenary sittings and meetings. For Section II (Council), the committee took note of the Council's decision, in view of the pressure on the ceiling for heading 5, to postpone to subsequent years expenditure for the acquisition of the LEX building to cater for enlargement. For Section IV (Court of Justice), it pointed out that the cost of the measures for some of the Court's priorities could be offset by a further reduction in staff expenditure without undermining the Court's enlargement preparations. It therefore authorised a number of establishment plan proposals, but reduced the appropriations which the Council had proposed for the creation of 53 enlargement-related linguistic posts. For Section V (Court of Auditors), it felt that the appropriations allocated in the draft budget would not allow the Court either to prepare for enlargement or to guarantee its normal functioning. It therefore increased the appropriations for personnel and premises and decided to offset these costs by making cuts in other areas. With regard to Sections VI (Economic and Social Committee) and VII (Committee of the Regions), it welcomed the decision of those two institutions to postpone the expenditure on the move to the Belliard complex to the 2004 budget, thereby reducing pressure on the 2003 budget. For Section VIII (A) (European Ombudsman), the committee entered appropriations for staff and translation costs. Lastly, as regards Section VIII(B) (European Data Protection Officer), it decided not to enter any appropriations in the 2003 budget for the time being, given that the European Data Protection Officer had not yet been appointed and that the office was not yet operational.