2004 budget: others sections

2003/2002(BUD) - 18/02/2003

The committee adopted the report by Neena GILL (PES, UK) on the 2004 budget - sections I, II, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII(A) and VIII(b). In its general remarks, the report stressed that enlargement was the political priority for the 2004 budget. While progress had been made in implementing the institutions' respective enlargement preparation strategies, much nevertheless remained to be done in 2003 and 2004. The institutions were, however, urged to present realistic requests in their 2004 estimates and to apply budgetary rigour. The committee added that the adoption of a budget for 25 Member States was necessary to reflect the historical importance of enlargement and urged the institutions to present their estimates on this basis and to clearly define all enlargement-related expenditure per item. Other priorities highlighted by the report included bringing the EU closer to its citizens, by promoting an "EU public media space" to disseminate information on the EU and raise public awareness about the impact of Community legislation on everyday life, and ensuring value for money in the institutions through improved quality of spending and an improved focus on core activities. There was also a need to improve interinstitutional cooperation. The report then looked at each of the institutions in turn. As far as Parliament was concerned, it called for an agreement to be reached on a statute for MEPs in time for specific budgetary decisions to be taken. In view of the Commission's new proposal on the statute for European political parties, it also wanted funding for such parties to be entered in Parliament's section of the budget. The report reiterated the EP's commitment to the principles of multilingualism as an integral part of its democratic legitimacy and said that the concept of "controlled multilingualism" should be further developed. Other recommendations included improving legislative assistance to Members and adopting a statute for Members' assistants. The committee also stressed the importance of information and communication policy as a means of bringing Parliament closer to its electorate and reiterated its support for internet broadcasting of plenary sittings and meetings of interest for the general public. It added that Parliament's website should be further improved. Lastly, it called for Parliament to stick to its self-imposed ceiling of 20% of heading 5 (administrative expenditure) as far as possible. Turning to the other institutions, the committee urged the Court of Justice to reduce the costs of the building project designed to cater for enlargement and to report on the progress achieved in getting rid of the backlog in translations following the creation of 51 linguistic posts. The report also expressed concern at the number of vacant posts in the Court of Auditors' auditing services. Lastly, the committee welcomed the successful use of the Internet as a means of enabling citizens to contact the European Ombudsman, and pledged to support further improvements to this service in the 2004 budget.