2004 budget: EP's estimates

2003/2016(BUD) - 29/04/2003

The committee adopted the report by Neena GILL (PES, UK) on the estimates of Parliament's revenue and expenditure for the 2004 financial year. The committee pointed out that the margin left under the ceiling in Heading 5 (Administrative expenditure) of the financial perspective would remain under pressure due inter alia to enlargement-related expenditure. It accordingly reiterated its view that Parliament must continue to apply a policy of budgetary rigour and make the best use of available resources in the current budget with the aim of reducing pressure in 2004. Pointing out that 2004 was a European election year, which would entail significant political, structural and budgetary implications, the report noted that, in addition to the challenges posed by enlargement, Parliament would also face profound changes in 2004. These would include the possible adoption of a Statute for Members, the increase in the total number of Members as provided for by the Treaty of Nice, the revision of the Staff Regulations and a reform of its administrative structure with a view to improving service to Members. The precise budgetary implications of some of these changes were not yet clear and would have to be taken into consideration during the 1st reading of the 2004 budget. The report also looked at a number of other key issues, including multilingualism. It stressed the need to further develop the concept of "controlled multilingualism" with a view to ensuring the best possible use of resources, while respecting the equality of all languages. In addition, the committee once more underlined the increased needs of Members and political groups for better interpretation facilities, especially in committee weeks, and called on the Secretary-General to examine, together with the interpretation services, the conditions under which distance interpretation would be feasible. With regard to information policy and new technologies, it recommended allocating EUR 1 million for internet broadcasting of plenary sittings and meetings, given that a number of meetings of great interest to the public would be taking place in the course of 2004 (i.e. relating to the accession of the new Member States, the hearings of future potential Commissioners and the inauguration of the new legislature). Other suggestions included setting up a user-friendly video library, following the example of other parliaments, making more use of video-conferencing as a way of reducing mission expenses, further enhancing interinstitutional cooperation in the area of IT, and looking at the possibilities for teleworking. Lastly, the report stressed the importance of Parliament's internet site as a means of communicating with the citizen and disseminating information, particularly in view of the forthcoming European elections and enlargement, and called for it to be modernised and "made more user-friendly and attractive". It added that Parliament's press and communication policy should increasingly focus on electronic means of communication and gradually reduce the amount of paper publications.