2003 budget: implementation, credit transfers, amending and supplementary budgets

2003/2026(BUD) - 17/06/2003

The committee unanimously adopted the report by Goran FÄRM (PES, S) on the 2003 budget: implementation profile, transfers of appropriations and supplementary and amending budgets. It was concerned at the increase in the level of total outstanding commitments (RAL) and called on the Commission to provide an overview of the commitments not implemented, cancelled, de-committed and lapsed since 1999, so as to determine which percentage of the budget was not only delayed but really not spent. As regards preparations for enlargement, MEPs asked the Commission to provide a breakdown of where the new posts created in 2001 and 2002 had been allocated and announced that they would pay particular attention to whether Parliament's priorities had been taken into account in the allocation of these posts. They also wanted the Commission to clarify future plans for DG Enlargement, especially with regard to staffing resources once the forthcoming enlargement had taken place (and taking into account needs for Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, etc.). On the 2002 surplus, the committee deplored the fact that it amounted to EUR 7.4 billion and called for a more efficient budgetary policy to be applied, particularly when it came to taking account of Parliament's political priorities. It noted that the Commission had advanced the explanation that the new Financial Regulation was largely to blame for the low level of implementation in the first four months of 2003 (lower than for the same period in 2002). On agricultural spending, the committee continued to be critical of the system of export subsidies for the transport of live animals and expressed its dissatisfaction that the Council had not accepted the change in nomenclature for the budget lines concerned which would, at least, have made the system more transparent. It intended to reintroduce this proposed change in future budgets. The problem of outstanding commitments was particularly acute in Heading 2 (structural operations), and the report urged the Commission to ensure the full application of the "N+2 rule" and to provide detailed and regular information (each quarter) on the risk of decommitment, including an assessment of its impact. The committee also pointed to a poor rate of implementation of commitments under Heading 3 (internal policies) and under Heading 4 (external policies), particularly for the Asia and Latin America programmes and for CFSP operations (despite the fact that additional appropriations were deemed necessary and granted by the budgetary authority for the 2003 budget). MEPs welcomed the fact that the Commission intended to replace its current direct budgetary assistance programme to the Palestinian Authority by more targeted support for the private sector and social services, as well as support for specific projects. Lastly, while welcoming the front-loading operation in the 2003 budget procedure, which had made it possible to safeguard preparations for enlargement, the committee nevertheless issued the caveat that "front-loading of administrative expenditure should be used only when no other options are available and if it does not lead to an excessive administrative and procedural burden or to legal problems as regards the annuality principle".