2004 budget: others sections

2003/2002(BUD) - 04/12/2003

The committee adopted the report by Jan MULDER (ELDR, NL) and Neena GILL (PES, UK) for the second reading of the 2004 EU budget (section III - Commission). This vote followed the adoption of the budget amendments at the committee's previous meeting on 1 December 2003. The budget that MEPs were proposing for 2004 sought to provide sufficient funding for enlargement and the EU's external policy commitments while still observing the principles of sound financial management. As regards agriculture, the committee approved Letter of Amendment No 2 which had taken on board Parliament's priorities as set out at 1st reading. These included the allocation of funds for further examination of environmental indicators, a new budget line for a pilot study on risks of livestock epidemics and the subdivision of the budget line on export refunds for beef and veal so as to ensure transparency of the funding for the export of live animals. Turning to the structural funds, the committee remained concerned about the high levels of unspent funding and outstanding commitments, which had risen again. It called on the Commission to present a detailed study on this matter in the first half of 2004. Regarding internal policies, the report noted that the Council had hardly accepted any of Parliament's amendments and pointed out that only marginal support was being given to pilot projects and preparatory actions. However, the committee approved the solution found at the budgetary conciliation of 24 November 2003 for financing the EU information offices known as Info Points. On external policy, MEPs welcomed the agreement reached in conciliation with the Council on funding for the reconstruction of Iraq as promised by the EU at the Madrid Donors' Conference. Although this had meant reallocating funds, the committee was still satisfied that Parliament's external policy priorities, such as the fight against poverty and Aids and measures to promote human rights, had been safeguarded. Lastly, on administrative expenditure, MEPs proposed that the request to fund 272 extra staff at the Commission because of enlargement should be approved. However, this was on condition that the Commission conduct the pilot projects and preparatory actions demanded by Parliament. The committee added that a geographical balance must be observed when recruiting staff from the new Member States.