Reforming the Commission: action plan, aspects concerning the Committee on Budgetary Control. White Paper

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The committee adopted the report by José Javier POMES RUIZ (EPP-ED, E) on the aspects of the Commission's White Paper falling within its remit. The report reiterated Parliament's wish to see the reform culminate in a strong, independent, transparent and efficient Commission. It noted that the White Paper had taken up most of the recommendations of the second report by the Committee of Independent Experts but stressed that it was up to the Commission to decide on its own organisational and working methods to ensure that resources were used as efficiently as possible. Parliament's role was to make a constructive contribution and to use its supervisory powers effectively. The Commission was urged to forward to Parliament the projected staffing plan showing all staff movement for the period during which the reform was to be implemented. The committee also argued that the Commission should incorporate its codes of conduct into its Rules of Procedure, and welcomed the proposal to set up an advisory committee on standards in public life, whose composition would be approved by Parliament. However, the proposal for a regulation on public access to Parliament, Council and Commission documents was too restrictive and the right of access to documents as provided for in Article 255 of the Treaty must be observed. The report was also critical of the Council's recent decision not to allow access to a whole category of documents (on security and defence). With regard to the outsourcing of some of the Commission's work, the committee was opposed to using this method for monitoring and inspection duties. However, it reserved final judgment pending the Commission's proposal on the regulatory framework for the implementing agencies. It welcomed the introduction of measures to improve management standards within the Commission and to make staff more accountable, especially directors and directors-general. The committee was also willing to consider early retirement schemes for staff as part of the reform and believed this would be possible under the Staff Regulations. It acknowledged the need for the Commission to have the right human resources to carry out its work but reminded the Commission of its duty to meet all its obligations deriving from the Treaties. The report called for the Financial Regulation to be overhauled as quickly as possible. It welcomed the Commission's decision to decentralise financial control to each directorate-general and its commitment to preserving the centralised ex-ante approval system for as long as was necessary and until the new system was working smoothly. Across-the-board ex-ante checks should be replaced by targeted ex-ante checks carried out on the basis of risk analysis. The committee also wanted the internal audit service to become operational as soon as possible. However, it rejected the Commission's idea of setting up an advisory financial irregularities panel of a help-desk nature to be used in cases of financial error or suspected irregularity, as this would circumvent and undermine OLAF.