2004 Budget: section III, Commission

2003/2001(BUD) - 11/03/2003 - Parliament's opinion on budgetary estimates/guidelines

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the report by Jan MULDER (ELDR, Netherlands) on the guidelines for the 2004 budgetary procedure. (Please refer to the document dated 18/02/03.) Parliament pointed out that adopting a budget for 25 Member States in December 2003 for 2004 will give a positive political signal and be in line with the budgetary principles reflected in the Treaty. The Commission is asked to make the appropriate proposals to allow the budgetary authority to adopt a single budget for 25 Member States, taking into account the fact that the 2004 budget will cover only 15 Member States for the first four months of the year. Parliament stressed that its assent to the outcome of the accession negotiations does not imply an agreement on figures for adjustment of the financial perspective. It is prepared to reject any attempt, now that the new Financial Regulation has entered into force, to restrict Parliament's powers granted by the Treaty, in particular the right to amend the draft budget to the same extent as before, including in respect of administrative expenditure. The successful integration of the new Member States will depend, amongst other things, on further improvements in administration and governance. Parliament announced that it would support the institution-building measures under headings 2 and 3, given that the administrative structures of the new Member States must have sufficient resources and technical assistance to facilitate management of structural actions and to avoid delays in launching programmes. New Member States must be promptly integrated into existing EU programmes. Parliament felt that particular importance is attached to the exchanges of employees between administrations and to training measures to prepare the departments concerned for participation in the employment strategy. The Commission is urged to improve the implementation of EU programmes and substantially reduce the administrative burden, not only in connection with the Structural Funds. This exercise must be speeded up and extended to other policy areas such as the framework programme for research and technological development, trans-European networks, education and training, employment and other activities, particularly those relevant to SMEs and NGOs. With regard to internal policies, Parliament mentioned the importance of combating terrorism without jeopardising civil rights, nuclear safety and the situation in Cyprus. On external actions, Parliament expressed concern about the humanitarian needs after conflict in Iraq. It stated its commitment to the financing of its external action priorities in cooperation with regions such as the Balkans and the Mediterranean third countries, as well as the reconstruction of Afghanistan without reducing the support to other regions. Due to serious budgetary constraints, it intends to evaluate the possibility of redeployment and flexibility inside the budget, as well as the recourse to the Interinstitutional Agreement, if the financing of additional needs cannot be covered otherwise. Finally, on the staff reform programme, Parliament underlined the need for an instrument to secure pensions, and cautioned against the increasing trend towards making agency staff officials.