2004 budget: others sections

2003/2002(BUD) - 11/03/2003 - Parliament's opinion on budgetary estimates/guidelines

The European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted by Neena GILL (PES, UK) on some sections of the budget guidelines and the Parliament's preliminary draft estimates. (Please see the document dated 18/02 /03). In respect of the Parliament itself, Members took the view that, following the adjustment of the financial perspective, Parliament should continue to budget up to 20% of heading 5 ("Administrative expenditure"). Besides enlargement preparations, additional cost factors such as buildings and the Members' statute could oblige it to exceed the self-imposed ceiling. On the question of the financing of political parties, Parliament considered that the appropriations should remain in the Commission's budget, instead of being entered in the Parliament's section. Parliament went on to state its willingness to examine the progress made with the necessary preparations to ensure that Parliament is fully operational by the date of accession on the basis of an updated multiannual report from the Steering Committee on Enlargement. Its administration and the Bureau, however, should further fine-tune their calculations to prepare for enlargement with a view to providing best value for money. Given the challenges posed by enlargement, it should also further examine which rationalisation measures could contribute to a more productive use of resources. Parliament's role as co-legislator has led to an increase in legislative work, which in turn has given rise to a need for more time and better facilities for Members for discussion and consultation, in particular during committee weeks. In view of the enlargement involving ten new countries, its competent bodies should examine the possibility of providing interpretation facilities to political groups to prepare committee meetings, including an assessment of the costs entailed, based on the assumption that there should be a limit to the number of languages. On the issue of bringing Parliament closer to its electorate, Parliament felt that the Internet should play a more important role in its information and communication policy. The "Europarl" site is becoming an increasingly important tool for both the general public and specialised users (journalists, national administrations, other institutions, and users from third countries, international organisations). The Internet is a most cost-effective way of providing information and communicating, as it can reach a very wide public at limited cost. The Secretary-General is asked to find ways to further improve Parliament's website with a view to making it more user-friendly and welcoming, more attractive and up-to-date, offering a great variety of topical information to both the general public and specialised users. On the question of staff policy, Parliament stated that its promotion and staff evaluation methods have served as an example for other institutions, but reform of the promotions policy is needed in order to create more incentives for performance and a more merit-based approach. The Secretary-General was also asked to ensure that the choice of candidates benefiting from the early retirement scheme reflects the operational needs of the institutions and is geared towards increasing productivity. With regard to its buildings, Parliament was disappointed thatthe negotiations with the Luxembourg authorities have not been as successful as expected on the purchase of the Konrad Adenauer Building, for which a reserve of EUR 35 million was earmarked in the 2003 budget. Parliament reminded the Luxembourg authorities of their commitment to take previous lease payments into account. Other options on the real estate market must be considered should the negotiations with Luxembourg produce no satisfactory results. The budgetary authority will not be willing to cover the financing for the unreasonable prices now being proposed. Moving on to the other institutions: Court of Justice - Parliament noted that up to ten additional judges for the Court of Justice and 10 new judges for the Court of First Instance will have to be accommodated, together with the staff of their respective private offices and other enlargement-related staff. Since the Court's building project to cater for enlargement will not be completed before 2005, Parliament is willing to examine the budgetary implications of finding additional office space in 2004 in Luxembourg, but the best price must be found. Court of Auditors - it will be imperative to ensure that auditing in the new Member States is brought closer to auditing practices in current Member States. The Court is asked to continue its efforts also with a view to facilitating the establishment of a single audit system in the European Union, as this will improve the use of resources, avoid duplication and contribute to a more effective audit of European funding. The number of vacant posts in the Court is a matter of concern. Economic and Social Committee and

Committee of the Regions - Parliament urged both Committees to ensure that their specific needs as regards the renovation of the Belliard building do not exceed the amount of EUR 26 million made available by the budgetary authority. The European Ombudsman - the number of electronic submissions to the Ombudsman has increased considerably and this trend will continue with enlargement. Parliament stated its willingness to support further improvements in the service to the citizen in the 2004 budget.