2007 budget: orientations, other sections

2006/2021(BUD) - 15/03/2006 - Budgetary text adopted by Parliament

The European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted by **Louis GRECH** (PES, Malta) on the guidelines for the 2007 budget procedure. The resolution was adopted by 621 votes in favour, 29 against and 12 abstentions.

General Framework: Parliament noted that over the years European institutions have failed to convince European citizens that they truly represent their interests and aspirations. Insufficient knowledge coupled with a poor perception makes understanding of EU policies difficult. Parliament took the view that the existing information services have to be improved and that an effective strategy, accessible to all European citizens, should be implemented as a matter of priority for all institutions. It invited all European institutions to study the feasibility of setting up a Centre of European Houses in Brussels, utilising existing resources without incurring any significant additional expenditure. In this "European Heart", EU citizens would be able to participate freely in various areas, including cultural and technical events, training seminars and exhibitions on specific topics. In such a scenario a wider segment of European citizens can identify themselves with the intellectual and cultural diversity of all European Member States.

European Parliament: Parliament committed itself to fulfilling its responsibilities as the only democratically elected representation of the people of the EU. It considered that, in view of the financial constraints being experienced at the moment, Parliament should reserve its position regarding the self-imposed limit of 20% of the expenditure under heading 5. Its estimates should reflect the real financial requirements in order to ensure an appropriate and efficient functioning of the institutions.

Budgetary rigour and added value: Parliament urged the Administration to make better and more efficient use of resources and avoid duplication of functions and reduce activities which do not add value to the overall objectives. It regretted the unnecessary and exorbitant costs due to the dispersion and duplication of activities in three different workplaces, which contribute to a highly inefficient cost structure. This should be re-addressed in an effort to minimise costs. Parliament invited the Administration to present specific proposals by 30 June 2006. It requested the Administration to identify activities which do not add value to its operations and to increase efficiency by rationalising working methods, thereby ensuring value for money for the European taxpayer.

Enlargement: Parliament stressed its commitment to make enlargement a real success. It noted that an amount of EUR 23 526 000 was allocated in the 2006 budget for the pre-enlargement preparations for Romania and Bulgaria, and invited the Administration to be prepared to offer adequate training programmes for staff coming from Romania and Bulgaria.

Information: Parliament agreed with the Secretary-General that the European Parliament requires a strong and effective information strategy that addresses Parliament's objective of bringing Europe closer to its citizens. However, spending more does not necessarily translate into better results. All Members, political groups and Administration should be involved and assume responsibility for their respective roles in the fields of information. Parliament considered it extremely urgent that, in tandem with discussions on an enhanced media presence, the structure of debates be examined. Furthermore, particular attention should be given to any information project, not only for its cost structure, but also for the value of its contents. All major publications and information-related projects should be prepared with the cooperation of political groups in order to create balanced programmes respecting the pluralism of opinions.

Visitors: Parliament regretted the high number of complaints concerning the visitors' programme, particularly as regards the non-availability of time-slots and the difference between grants and real costs,

and stressed that an attractive and high value visitors' programme is one of the top priorities for the year 2007. Direct contact with European citizens through an improved visitors' service will have a multiplier effect that will enhance the perception of the Parliament in the eyes of the citizens.

Member's Assistant Statute: Parliament reiterated its position in support of the adoption of a real and meaningful statute for Members' assistants. It regretted that very little progress has been achieved on the matter, and urged the Council to take a decision on the Regulation.

Property: the policy on the purchasing of properties and buildings has yielded positive and tangible results providing Parliament with a strong asset base as well as generating savings, which in turn allowed it to use these funds for other projects. The Bureau must ensure that all Parliament's buildings are environmentally friendly as well as user-friendly, especially for persons with disabilities. Considering the envisaged financial constraints in the coming years, Parliament called on the Bureau to consider a multiannual property investment plan instead of an annual plan and to continue with the policy of accelerated payments.

Employment: human resources costs must be in line with operational requirements and with the financial situation of the institution. Parliament called on the Administration to examine the possibility of redeploying existing staff instead of relying on contract agents. The long-term quality of legislative work of the House has to be carried out by staff with a long-term commitment to Parliament rather than by utilising contract agents.

Reports and information requested before the first reading of Parliament's budget: Parliament invited the Secretary-General to provide certain information in order to allow an effective decision-making process. This includes : a report on "more effective budgeting", which was requested following the 2006 Budget Guidelines ; study of the financial impact of the introduction of the Irish language as the twenty-first working language of the European Parliament ; on the recruitment situation in relation to the 2004 enlargement, with particular reference to the linguistic sector giving a breakdown between officials, temporary and contractual staff; proposals on how to connect Parliament with those EU citizens who are not Internet users or who do not have access to it; and a report on a mid-term budgetary review on the state of implementation of the current year.

Parliament went on to comment briefly on the other institutions. With regard to the Council, it recalled that the gentlemen's agreement only applies to administrative expenditure. Consequently, budgetary rigour should also apply to the appropriation allocated to cover expenditure on CFSP.

Finally, Parliament invited the European Data Protection Supervisor to present to Parliament its medium-term priorities, including all the financial implications, in order to enable Parliament to evaluate these priorities, especially if they happen to be in areas where support is needed in terms of buildings and logistics.