

2008 budget: orientations, other sections

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The committee adopted the report by Ville ITÄLÄ (EPP-ED, FI) on the guidelines for the 2008 budget procedure (sections other than the Commission) and the European Parliament's preliminary draft estimates.

As far as the general framework is concerned, the report noted that, mainly as a result of enlargement, the budget of the institutions had increased by nearly 18% in the last four years. All the institutions had now reached "a fully functional stage", and the committee called for them to adopt a "prudent" budgetary approach when setting up their 2008 estimates, bearing in mind inter alia that efficient use of taxpayers' money can help to boost citizens' confidence in the EU institutions. The institutions' 2008 budget should therefore remain close to the level of the previous year.

As far as Parliament was concerned, the committee said that the 2008 budget should focus upon enhancing the EP's communication tools in order to "inform effectively the EU citizen on its activities and contribution to European construction". There was a need to improve existing channels of communication in order to raise European citizens' awareness of Parliament's role in the legislative and decision-making process and to "address the shortcomings related to the image of the European Union, especially in view of the 2009 elections". Particular emphasis should be placed on informing local and regional media.

The report also stressed that, as a co-legislator, Parliament should be able to provide its Members with optimal working conditions enabling them to fulfil their role and enhance the quality of EU legislation. It therefore called for the administration to look into the possibility of extending the Library facilities through the establishment of an "an extensive single document and information repository of all existing texts and expertise (Knowledge Management System)." It also called for "a more personal level of service to Members, under transparent and clearly defined conditions".

The committee "deplores the geographical dispersion" of Parliament's administration among the three places of work and "the additional costs that this implies in terms of running costs and in particular when travelling from one place to another." It said that the budget could be used to improve this situation through investment in new technologies" in order to limit the negative impact of the European Parliament's geographical layout such as the synchronisation of computers with mobile phones or the use of video conference rooms."

On staffing, the committee said that Parliament should now have "the human resources necessary for its functioning and should take the time to integrate them efficiently". It again voiced its concern about 'the costs related to geographical dispersion" and called for greater efficiency with regard to missions undertaken by staff within the three places of work. On buildings policy, the report recognised the savings achieved due to the advance payments made over the last 10 years on buildings and stressed that Parliament would now start to focus its investment on external offices. It called for a common report from Parliament and the Commission on the modalities of co-sharing the external offices.

Lastly, as far as the other institutions are concerned, the report called on them to present "a budget which reflects their real needs", to reinforce their interinstitutional cooperation, to "suspend the further growth of their real estate" and "examine carefully all other possibilities before foreseeing any further extension of buildings", and to monitor closely the level of recruitment of staff related to the last two enlargements. It also pointed out that harmonisation in the presentation of the estimates of the institutions would make the different budgets easier to understand and increase transparency for EU citizens.

