2008 budget: orientations, other sections

2007/2013(BUD) - 29/03/2007 - Parliament's opinion on budgetary estimates/guidelines

The European Parliament adopted the report by Ville **ITÄLÄ** (EPP-ED, FI) on the guidelines for the 2008 budget procedure. It found itself in broad agreement with its competent committee andnoted that the ceiling of heading 5 in 2008 is **EUR 7 457 000 000** which represents an increase of 4.8% compared to 2007. Mainly as a result of enlargement**,** the budget of the institutions has increased by nearly 18% in the last four years.

Parliament called on the institutions to adopt a **prudent budgetary approach** when setting up their 2008 Estimates. The institutions' 2008 budget should in principle remain close to the level of the previous year's budget since no major events (enlargements or new languages) justifying an increase are foreseen. Any new initiative should be financed, in the first instance, within the ceiling of the current budget, unless there are specific grounds to the contrary.

Parliament acknowledged that interinstitutional cooperation could be beneficial in terms of economies of scale and in terms of efficiency but could also undermine an institution's independence or identity. A correct balance should be sought among all the institutions for these elements. It expected to receive, by 1 July 2007 , information on the quality, efficiency and financial aspects, as well as the possible advantages and disadvantages of the interinstitutional cooperation. Parliament also asked for reports on the recruitment of staff from EU-10 and EU-2 and the status of recruited staff.

In the second part of its resolution, Parliament addressed the situation in each institution separately:

European Parliament: as a co-legislator, optimal working conditions should be provided to Members of the European Parliament in order to facilitate the accomplishment of their role and enhance the quality of EU legislation. Assistance to Members could be improved by providing the adequate specialised or technical information within short time frames. MEPs should be better informed on the basis of the work undertaken by different services within Parliament (studies, technical and background documents). In addition, the best possible linguistic services should be provided to all Members, and Parliament wished to explore the possibility of having meetings rooms available to all Members for talks with experts in relatively small groups.

Parliament deplored **the geographical dispersion of its administration** among the three places of work and the additional costs that this implied in terms of running costs and in particular when travelling from one place to another. The administration should provide Members with all kinds of facilities which offer 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. Parliament also expressed its concern about the uncertainties relating to the European School system, and undertook to ensure that such a system is maintained.

With regard to enhancing the effectiveness of the **communication tools of Parliament** and its political groups, Parliament wantsto improve the tools used to raise European citizens' awareness of the role of the European Parliament 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. The existing channels of communication do not respond adequately to this need. It invited the administration to provide an action plan for communication oriented to the local and regional media and to explore new tools, in particular in order to prepare the next European elections. It also called for an inventory, by 1 July 2007, of the actions on communication set up by external offices and in partnership with the Commission in the Houses of Europe and an assessment of their effectiveness and impact.

With regard to **visitors' groups** of Members, Parliament considered that the new policy represented an improvement compared to the former situation, but felt that further improvements are possible in areas where visitors are exposed to the real life of Parliament.

On the question of budget allocation, Parliament considered that the budgetary level for 2008 including increases relating to adjustment on current prices should aim at remaining at the budgetary level of 2007 and should not in any event be more than **20% of heading 5** which should constitute the upper limit of the budget. Parliament regretted the limited flow of information on issues that are of joint competence with other decision-making bodies of the European Parliament and especially as regards decisions that have a financial impact on the European Parliament's budget. Mutual efforts should be deployed to enhance the exchange of information at an early stage of decision making.

With regard to **buildings**, Parliament underlined that it is now the owner of most of its buildings in the three places of work and will start to focus its investment on external offices. It intended to re-examine the principle of sharing the external offices with the Commission and called for the establishment of a common report, from the Commission and the European Parliament, on the modalities of co-sharing offices in terms of staff, logistics, running costs and the different time schedules of co-financing the purchase of joint offices.

With regard to **staff,** Parliament felt that, after the recent increase of the establishment plan (21% over a period of four years), the institution should have the human resources necessary for its functioning. It would therefore consider any request for new posts after the administration had presented a report with its short and medium term strategy regarding redeployment possibilities. However, it wanted to address the shortcomings impeding the availability and best quality of interpretation services. Parliament supported the adoption of a real and meaningful statute for Members´ assistants, and expected the Council to take a final decision on this issue by the beginning of September 2007.

On the matter of **security**, Parliament encouraged the administration to implement the new badge system as quickly as possible which would ease the Members' day-to-day work, in particular the use of electronic signatures. With regard to the **environment,** Parliament stated that EU institutions should serve as an example in implementing environmentally friendly policies and improved energy efficiency.

Other institutions: Parliament invites the institutions to present a budget which reflects their real needs. After two major enlargements and the introduction of 12 languages, 2008 should be a year of mobilisation of the means available (human, technological and logistical) in the most efficient way. It encouraged the institutions to reinforce their interinstitutional cooperation even in fields where at first glance they do not see any potential for rationalisation and for improving efficiency, given that the budget of the institutions will not grow in the future at the same rhythm as in the past. Noting that the institutions have substantially increased their building expenditure over the last years and will further increase it in the next four years, Parliament considered that it is time to suspend the further growth of their real estate. The institutions must examine carefully all other possibilities before foreseeing any further extension of buildings. Moreover it called on the institutions to be ready to **share the remaining amount available in their budgets** at the end of the year, to absorb their building expenses as quickly as possible.

Parliament recalled 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. This would allow the budgetary authority to better evaluate and understand the specific needs of each institution.

With regard to the needs of each institution, Parliament considered as follows:

Council: Parliament noted the limited increase of the Council's budget in 2007 and acknowledged the fact that the Council is providing relevant information on the topics of Parliament's interest;

Court of Justice: it felt that, after the establishment of the Civil Service Tribunal and two major enlargements, the Court should rationalise its working methods and keep the level of its budget stable;

Court of Auditors: Parliament took note of the development of appropriate training programmes for junior auditors and the modernisation of the informatics sector initiated last year and expected to have more information on the result achieved until now of these initiatives;

European Economic and Social Committee & Committee of the Regions: Parliament expected to receive a clear signal on the nature of the future collaboration between the two Committees from 2008 onwards, by the time of the presentation of the estimates. It would not be sufficient reason to increase the overall level of their respective budgets;

Ombudsman: Parliament notedthe efforts made by the Ombudsman to stabilise the growth of its budget and in particular of the establishment plan in 200, and expected this stability to be maintained in 2008;

European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS): Parliament noted that 2008 will be the fourth full year of activity for the EDPS which will soon reach cruising speed. It encouraged the EDPS to submit a medium-term plan of activities which would include its needs and a deadline regarding the implementation of the new nomenclature as initiated by the other institutions since 2005.