2008 budget: the European Parliament's estimates

2007/2018(BUD) - 07/06/2007 - Parliament's opinion on budgetary estimates/guidelines

The European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted Ville **ITÄLÄ** (EPP-ED, FI) on the draft estimates of the European Parliament's revenue and expenditure (2008), and confirmed the general orientation of its budgets committee. (Please see the summary of 21/05/2007). It indicated that the 2008 budget should be aimed at the budgetary level of 2007, increased by the inflation rate of 2%, unless there are specific grounds to the contrary. The political priorities for 2008 are the provision of efficient services to Members to enable better law-making, enhancement of the effectiveness of the communication tools of the European Parliament and its political groups and improvement of the budget allocation.

Parliament was pleased to recall that that the process of purchasing the European Parliament's premises in its three places of work should, in the long term, lead to substantial savings for the EU tax-payer and that all budgetary requests should be based on justified needs. However, the budgetary authority has not been provided with sufficiently detailed and precise information on all budgetary allocations. The preliminary draft estimates give an amount of EUR 55 million for "Reserve for priority projects under development " and EUR 10.3 million for the pre-election campaign without providing any detailed justification for those amounts. The plenary reiterated that the 20% level of Heading 5 should constitute the upper limit of the budget, and was disappointed that the Bureau set the level of the budget at EUR 1 491 400 000 which represents the full 20% of Heading 5. In accordance with the position of the budgets committee, Parliament decided to leave a token entry ("pm") in Chapter 10 4 ("Reserve for information and communication policy") and Chapter 10 6 ("Reserve for priority projects under development"), which will set the budget at EUR 1 436 400 000, representing an increase of 2,8% over the 2007 budget. It was willing to decide on the amount to be allocated to these projects once the concrete information is presented. Parliament also emphasised the fact that the 2008 draft estimates include an increase of 6,7% over the 2007 budget despite savings made from ceasing to translate the verbatim reports of proceedings (EUR 9 million) and the transfer of the management of costs related to termination-of-service allowances to the Commission.

Information policy: Parliament noted the proposals to allocate an overall budget of EUR 41.8 million to information policy, which will include EUR 10.3 million for an awareness campaign in view of the 2009 European elections, EUR 9 million for implementation of the Parliamentary Television Channel (WebTV), EUR 15.7 million for the Audiovisual Centre and EUR 6.8 million to complete the construction of the Visitors' Centre. It wanted the administration to present a proposal before the first reading of the budget on the information campaign relating to the next European elections.

At the same time, Parliament wanted to examine the feasibility of providing each Member with proper means for inviting local journalists to come to the European Parliament, in same way as visitors groups, and it noted the delay in the WebTV project.

The appropriations allocated in the 2007 budget will not be used as initially anticipated, but will be carried forward to 2008, subject to final approval of the prototype.

Multilingualism: Parliament stated that it was willing to consider a proposal for restructuring the interpretation service, while insisting that the administration enforce more actively the code of conduct on multilingualism, in order to ensure suitable and efficient linguistic support for Members. It was willing to consider within this framework the possible extension of this service to more personal linguistic assistance to Members. Parliament was very concerned by the fact that translations of documents are frequently not

available in all languages for debates in committees, and insisted that it was vital to provide the appropriate means and ensure an adequate organisation of the translation service in order to prevent any shortcomings and the consequent increase of costs.

Buildings: Parliament was surprised by the substantial increase in the Item "Rent ", which absorbs half of the savings resulting from the purchase of the Strasbourg buildings. It understood that this was based on developments in the real estate market and the need to rent an additional building in Luxembourg during the work on the extension of the KAD building. It recommended that the administration bear these factors in mind before proposing further purchases of external offices that could not be considered a priority with regard to the three places of work.

Parliament was strongly of the view that a global approach must be taken when deciding on renting, purchasing or fitting-out buildings. Every decision concerning buildings policy must take into account the longer-term financial consequences. Parliament would assess the information provided on the overall costs of its buildings policy before allocating the appropriations requested, and it asked the administration to provide detailed information on the fitting-out works, especially those foreseen in Brussels and the newly acquired buildings in Strasbourg.

Informatics: Parliament noted that the increase in IT expenditure over the last four years has reached 28% and has left some key functions in the hands of external staff. Given that the administration must justify its financial requests, the Directorate on Information Technologies (DIT) should make proposals to rationalise its costs in the context of the amending letter.

Staff: Parliament considered that efforts could be made to limit the number of staff missions to Strasbourg and, where possible, to make better use of new technologies such as video conferencing. Accordingly, it decided to limit the appropriation allocated to Article 300 ("Staff mission allowances ") to the level of the 2007 budget and to enter the increase of EUR 1 490 000, requested for 2008, in the Chapter on provisional appropriation.

Security: Parliament was surprised by the increase in the item on security of 36,8% compared to last year's budget due to a substantial increase in the maintenance costs of the security infrastructure and to certain investments, such as the new radio system. It insisted on the fact that the security of the European Parliament's premises, its Members and staff, is an important issue that nevertheless calls for a prudent approach as regards its possible financial impact. It invited the administration to re-examine its request and to present a new proposal by the time of the amending letter. Parliament decided, consequently, to enter EUR 2 000 000, allocated to new projects, in the chapter on provisional appropriation.