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Committee on Petitions

2007/2019B(BUD)

3.10.2007

OPINION

of the Committee on Petitions

for the Committee on Budgets

on the draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2008
(C6-0289/2007) - 2007/2019B(BUD))

Section VIII(A) - European Ombudsman

Draftswoman: Luciana Sbarbati

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SHORT JUSTIFICATION

The Committee on Petitions has taken note of the European Ombudsman's estimates of his budgetary requirements for the year 2008, which he submitted to the President of the European Parliament by letter of 4 April 2007, in accordance with Article 31 of the Financial Regulation.

We all know that the Ombudsman has a range of different activities. In addition to the core activity of handling complaints and making enquiries, over time complementary activities have developed, such as that of cooperation within the European network of ombudsmen, and subsidiary activities, such as that of communication, which has recently crystallised into a threefold strategy of public relations, restructuring of the website and communication targeted at categories and groups of users. As well as these, there are administrative and management activities, both horizontal and those supporting the activities geared to the public who approach the Ombudsman.

The final figures for 2006 show that expenditure on staff and the cost of the activities which are closely related to the Ombudsman's mandate account for not more than 48% of the total, while those concerning communication and horizontal services account for 21% and 24%, respectively.

With regard to the workload attributable to complaints, the figures for the first quarter of 2007 appear to confirm that the level recorded in the two previous years remains stable. On this basis the projected expenditure for the Ombudsman's budget for 2008 should remain little changed.

The total appropriations requested amount to € 8 252 800, representing an increase of € 382 200 and equivalent to a 4.69% increase over the 2007 budget. For the same period the European Parliament is projecting expenditure amounting to € 1 491 400 000, which represents a 6.7% increase compared with last year. In this context the budget shows clearly that expenditure on staff, which is a fixed heading, accounts for 75.4% of the total. Although the stabilisation of the workload has curbed the growth in the establishment plan, which almost doubled between 2003 and 2006, from 31 posts to 57 now, the biggest increase in expenditure, equivalent to a 4.65% increase, is accounted for by the upgrading of 12 existing posts (11 ASTs and 1 AD), compared with a 3% increase in expenditure for that purpose in the European Parliament's budget.

The new policy on translation, involving cooperation with the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the EU, the streamlining of the main working documents, the selection of documents to be translated and the posting of some of these, in summary form, on the Internet does not yet seem to have borne fruit, particularly in terms of cost savings. A further source of expenditure for 2008 is apparently attributable to the increased unit cost (rising from € 42.50 to €59.60) per page translated for the Ombudsman by the European Parliament. This would entail a 13% increase for expenditure on this item, compared with 2007. The draftswoman not only does not underestimate the importance of interpreting and translation services as vehicles for a range of forms of dialogue with the public, but also supports their enhancement, so as to

reduce the time needed by individual Members to access the documents, with a view to improving all the procedures; however, she also calls on the Ombudsman to diversify his sources of translation by opting for the most economical – such as the Translation Centre and freelance translators – and also to improve their contractual performance in terms of speed and the effectiveness of what is produced.

Finally, the draftsman urges the Ombudsman to make full use of all the potential offered by the new cooperation agreement between the two Institutions, which was signed on 15 March 2006 and came into effect in April 2006. In this connection she calls on him to submit a report on and an up-to-date assessment of the results of the agreement, particularly in the key sectors of translation and information technology (Articles 7 and 12), where it is possible to achieve the greatest degree of synergy, in relation to the parallels between the Ombudsman's main activity and the more wide-ranging activity of the Committee on Petitions.

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Petitions calls on the Committee on Budgets, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Considers that the 4.69% increase in the budget can be approved, bearing in mind the impact of inflation and the increased cost of living as anticipated by the Commission, provided that it represents a reference threshold for the future if the stabilisation of the level of complaints continues;
2. Is pleased that the Ombudsman has succeeded in generating savings on some budget lines, albeit on a smaller scale than in 2007, and encourages him to continue the policy of redeploying savings on expenditure in his budget;
3. Asks the Ombudsman's Office to take a multiannual view of the costs of upgrading staff posts (12 in 2008, including 11 ASTs and 1 AD), and to give reasons case by case, in the annual report, for the use of the possibilities for career progression, indicating the various criteria used for promotions;
4. Supports the Ombudsman's more elastic approach to translation policy, aimed at making the working documents produced more appropriate to the needs of users;
5. Calls on the Ombudsman to rationalise translation costs and, to that end, to make use of services outside the European Parliament, using contractual means to increase the diversification of the sources used and, at the same time, to optimise the results achieved therefrom;
6. Reminds the parties to the Interinstitutional Agreement of 15 March 2006 of the need for scrupulous compliance with Article 1(4) thereof concerning payment for cooperative services, on the basis of fair, transparent and reasonable estimates;
7. Calls on the Ombudsman to report on the application of the new cooperation agreement with the European Parliament, which has been in force for over a year, indicating what

have been its benefits and limitations or obstacles, and also signalling what opportunities can be exploited, in particular in the key sectors of interpreting, translation and information technology.

PROCEDURE

Title	Draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2008
References	C6-0289/2007 - 2007/2019B(BUD)
Committee(s) asked for opinion(s) Date announced in plenary	PETI
Rapporteur Date appointed	Luciana Sbarbati 2.5.2007
Previous rapporteur(s)	
Discussed in committee	17.7.2007
Date adopted	3.10.2007
Result of final vote	+ : 19 - : 0 0 : 0
Members present for the final vote	Simon Busuttil, Michael Cashman, Proinsias De Rossa, Alexandra Dobolyi, David Hammerstein, Marian Harkin, Carlos José Iturgaiz Angulo, Lasse Lehtinen, Marcin Libicki, Miguel Angel Martínez Martínez, Maria Matsouka, Manolis Mavrommatis, Mairead McGuinness, Gay Mitchell, Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, Kathy Sinnott, Radu Țirle
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Carlos Carnero González, Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	
Date tabled	8.10.2007
Comments (available in one language only)	