

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2004



2009

Committee on Petitions

2006/2018B(BUD)

13.9.2006

OPINION

of the Committee on Petitions

for the Committee on Budgets

on the draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2007
(C6-0000/2006 - 2006/2018B(BUD))

Section VIII(A) - European Ombudsman

Draftswoman: Alexandra Dobolyi

SHORT JUSTIFICATION

The Committee on Petitions has taken note of the European Ombudsman's estimates of the budgetary requirements for the year 2007, which he submitted to the budgetary authority in accordance with Article 31 of the Financial Regulation¹.

According to the estimates document the Ombudsman considers his two core activities as being:

- handling complaints and making enquiries, either based on complaints or on his own initiative. In doing so, he co-operates and liaises with a network of national ombudsmen and similar bodies in the EU; and
- communicating with and reaching out to citizens; as well as informing them about their rights under community law. This implies significant activity in the field of communication, publication and information.

In order to be able to perform these activities efficiently and effectively the Ombudsman's staff also has to perform a number of horizontal administrative and management activities. These include budgetary, financial and staff management, IT-management, archiving, non-complaint related correspondence with citizens, liaising with other institutions, etc.

Main features of the budget

The total budget requested amounts to € 8,252,800. This represents an increase of 7.4% (+ € 570,262) in relation with the 2006 budget. In real terms the estimates show a relatively limited growth of 5.4%.

Savings and redeployment in operational expenditure

The estimates show an increase in 8 out of 36 budgetary lines. As a result 24 lines show a decrease and 4 lines remain unchanged. A total of € 420,000 has been redeployed, representing 5.09% of the total budget (against 4.5% in 2006). This result has been achieved by systematic and close scrutiny of all budgetary lines with a view to generating savings in a budget with only a limited number of budgetary items allowing for potential savings.

Workload

In 2005 the Ombudsman received 3920 complaints. This represents a 5.2% increase compared to 2004. The 2005 figure confirms the upward trend and the figures for 2006 suggest a stabilisation at the high level of 2005. It should be noted however that some 70% of all complaints submitted did not fall within the Ombudsman's mandate, and that the number of complaints leading to an inquiry was 726 (of which 389 led to one joint inquiry).

Consolidation of the establishment plan

Over the years the Ombudsman's workload has increased steadily, as has the establishment plan of his office. From 2003 to 2006 the Ombudsman's staff has almost doubled, from 31 posts in 2003 to 57 posts in 2006. This compares with an establishment plan in the secretariat

¹ Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 of 25 June 2002 on the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities (OJ L 248 of 16.09.2002, p. 1).

of the Committee on Petitions which has grown only very marginally and still numbers only 18 posts. For 2007 the Ombudsman does not request any new posts. There is a request, however, for the upgrading of 10 existing posts (5 AD and 5 AST).

Recasting translation policy

During the last two budgetary exercises, the rise in translation needs was not completely compensated by an increase of appropriations in the budget. In order to fulfil the Ombudsman's legal obligations and to reduce the cost of translation, a new translation policy has been adopted, and will be implemented, which involves a cooperation agreement with the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the EU, reducing the size of the Annual Report, abandoning less important translations, and putting an increased number of summaries of the main decisions on the internet. This policy is expected to have a positive effect on the appropriations required, both in the short and the long term.

Rationalisation of working relations with the European Parliament

On 15 March 2006 the new cooperation agreement with the European Parliament was signed. It entered into force in mid-April. The new agreement allows, among other things, for greater transparency of the pricing policy with services being paid on the basis of individual costs, except for auditing and accounting for which a lump sum applies. Also, negotiations with the Parliament will start on a possible extension of office space. However, this should not be at the expense of Parliament's own requirements.

Implementation of mid-term operational strategies

The Ombudsman's estimates for 2007 are based on the identification of the projects to be implemented in 2007 and the ensuing years (2008 and 2009). This allows for a multi-annual view and a more balanced approach in the allocation of projects over the years as well as spreading out the need for appropriations in order to generate redeployments. In line with this strategy the Ombudsman has decided to focus in 2007 only on the organisation of the National Ombudsmen biennial seminar, which was organised by the European Ombudsman for the last time in 1996. Despite the costs of such a meeting this approach results in only a slight increase of 1.5% (+ 12,000 €) in Title 3 expenditure.

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. Takes the view that the total amount of budgetary resources requested by the Ombudsman will enable him to meet the obligations under his Statute, the implementing provisions and the new cooperation agreement, and will allow him to perform his duties effectively;
2. Notes that the 5.4% increase (in real terms) in the budget is relatively small, given the increase in the total amount of complaints received, inflation and the increased cost of living as anticipated by the Commission;
3. Is pleased that the Ombudsman has been able to generate savings on a number of budget lines and has increased the redeployment rate in his budget from 4.5% in the 2006 budget to 5.09% in the 2007 budget;
4. Supports the consolidation of the Ombudsman's establishment plan and his request for the upgrading of 10 existing posts (5 AST and 5 AD);
5. Supports the recasting of the Ombudsman's translation policy and encourages him to keep looking for efficient solutions to bring down translation costs, whilst guaranteeing a high level of public service and enhancing the relations and the trust between the citizens of the European Union and the European institutions;
6. Commends the Ombudsman for the implementation of mid-term strategies, which allow for a multi-annual view and a balanced allocation of projects over the years and for the spreading out of appropriations and the generating of redeployments;
7. Takes note of the new cooperation agreement signed by the Ombudsman and the President of the European Parliament on 15 March 2006; considers that the agreement reaffirms the relations between the two institutions with regard to concrete cooperation in a number of areas, based on the principles of mutual respect of the parties' independence, their respective powers and their respective mandates and roles;
8. Hopes that the new agreement will lead to improvements in the exchange of information between the relevant services and will encourage and strengthen procedures for mutual consultation and, in general, create structures for closer cooperation with a view to allowing each party to perform its tasks more effectively.

PROCEDURE

Title	The draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2007		
Procedure number	2006/2018B(INI)		
Committee responsible	BUDG		
Opinion by Date announced in plenary	PETI 0.0.0000		
Enhanced cooperation – date announced in plenary			
Drafts(wo)man Date appointed	Alexandra Dobolyi 21.3.2006		
Previous drafts(wo)man			
Discussed in committee	13.9.2006	0.0.0000	0.0.0000
Date adopted	13.9.2006		
Result of final vote	+: -: 0:	9 0 0	
Members present for the final vote	Marcin Libicki, Maria Matsouka, Robert Atkins, Carlos José Iturgaiz Angulo, Manolis Mavrommatis, Proinsias De Rossa, Alexandra Dobolyi, David Hammerstein Mintz, Margrete Auken, Willy Meyer Pleite,		
Substitute(s) present for the final vote			
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote			
Comments (available in one language only)	...		