

European Parliament press release on the EU budget (26 July 2006)

Caption: This European Parliament press release, dated 26 July 2006, reviews the procedure for the adoption of the 2007 budget during the summer recess.

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Summer reading matters: The EU budget

Most MEPs and Parliament staff spend much of August back in their home countries or at their preferred holiday destination. Parliament's usually bustling corridors and meeting rooms become virtually abandoned. Still, a few people stand guard or take work with them. This is particularly true for all those involved in drawing up the EU budget - which will be over 1,800 pages comprising more than 1,500 budget lines. Its timely adoption requires a good deal of work during the summer weeks.

The budgetary procedure starts once the European Commission adopts a budget proposal or "Preliminary Draft Budget". On 3 May 2006, the Commission adopted a proposal for a total budget of €116.4 billion for 2007, equivalent to 0.99% of the EU's gross national income.

Council reduced Commission budget proposal for 2007

This budget proposal can be amended by both the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament in two readings which take place between July and December and involve several rounds of negotiations between the institutions. On 14 July, at the Council's first reading, EU finance ministers decided to reduce a number of budget lines, notably on the recruitment of staff.

The ball is now in the Parliament's court for its first reading. The EP is well prepared: by the end of April it had already identified a number of areas which it wants to prioritise, based on a report by budget rapporteur James Elles MEP - a British Conservative in the EPP-ED Group.

In July, Parliament's specialised committees started to examine the budget lines within their respective policy areas. Within each committee, one Member is charged with drafting an Opinion that includes amendments to increase or decrease a budget line.

Committees prepare budget amendments in August

In order for the committee Opinions to be submitted to the Budgets Committee by 13 September, MEPs have to table their amendments before the end of August. The political groups may also submit amendments but can do so until 20 September.

In the meantime, the Budgets Committee (with the support of the Parliament secretariat, political advisors and assistants) processes and analyses the outcome of the first Council reading and possible conflicts with Parliament's priorities. In addition, pilot projects for new policies the EP wishes to introduce are identified.

Once the amendments start to come in, the Budgets Committee runs simulations to check the amendments against legal maximum increases and budgetary ceilings as agreed by all institutions in the Multi-annual Financial Framework. So, once the Parliament starts to run on full steam again in the last week of August, everything is sound and well prepared for the things to come: the first reading in the Budgets Committee and the heat of the October plenary, and afterwards, during the autumn months the bargaining with the finance ministers - when everybody's summer tan has faded.