

Information

Brussels, 22 June 1973

The Political Affairs Committee and the Committee on Budgets met in joint session in Brussels to discuss the Commission's proposals for giving the European Parliament greater budgetary powers. The majority of the members of the two Committees were both critical and skeptical about the proposals, although they appreciated the positive features they contained. There was a strong current of dissatisfaction at the inadequacy of the proposals: if they were not to be replaced by other proposals at least they should be given greater weight through the explicit provision that Parliament is empowered, at the end of the budgetary procedure, to reject the whole draft budget.

The two Committees met under the chairmanship of Mr Giovanni GIRAUDDO (Italian Christian-Democrat) in what was described as an extraordinary meeting. Mr Claude CHEYSSON attended for the Commission. As a basis for discussion a working document and a motion were submitted by Mr Georges SPÉNALE (French Socialist), chairman of the Committee on Budgets. It is intended to lay the motion before the whole House in Strasbourg in July.

Mr Peter KIRK (British Conservative) will be submitting a report this autumn as a basis for a debate by the whole House on Parliament's powers in general.

Giving the Committees his provisional assessment, Mr SPÉNALE welcomed the proposals that Parliament should in future give a discharge on the execution of the budget, that there should be a European Audit Office to exercise external control in the Communities, that loans raised should be subject to Parliament's approval and that the ECSC levy should require no more than Parliament's assent to be established by the High Authority.

Mr SPÉNALE was also glad to note that the Commission had adopted Parliament's proposal that in the event of the Community's creating new resources for itself the procedure should require unanimity on the Council and an absolute majority of members of Parliament in support (and two-thirds of the votes cast). The difficulty is that the ultimate power of decision on the creation of new own resources remains with the Council and is not transferred to the European Parliament.

For Mr SPÉNALE this objection lay in the fact that the European Commission made no reference to the possibility of Parliament rejecting the draft budget as a whole in the last instance and, in the end, placing the Council in a position where it has to make new proposals. Here the Commission had departed from the interpretation it had given in april 1970.

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Mr SPÉNALE was not very impressed by the proposed "second reading" procedure in respect of major decisions having budgetary effects stretching over a number of years. He thought this inadequate and inappropriate because it in no way altered the present unsatisfactory situation where the Council had the last word.

Summing up he said the proposals did nothing to remedy the imbalance between the institutions of the Community.

In reply Mr CHEYSSON did not rule out the possibility that the Commission would make supplementary proposals to include a provision that Parliament be empowered to reject the whole draft budget. He said it would be of more than academic importance if Commission and Council were to do everything they could to avert the threat of a crisis which would result from its rejection.

Apart from reservations about the wording on one or two points the Committees were, by and large, in agreement with the objections raised by Mr SPÉNALE.
