

MFF: ALDE warns the Council against any denial of democracy

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Liberals and Democrats are concerned about the progress of discussions within the triologue between Parliament, Council and the Commission on the next Multiannual Financial Framework. The Irish Presidency obviously lacks the necessary leeway to meet the Parliament's demands: mandatory review clause, flexibility between years and chapters both in payments and commitments, system of own resources, and a modern and innovative budget. This intransigence is all the more surprising as the two institutions are not disputing the figures. The Council not only denies Parliament of its fair exercise of budgetary powers, but also challenges its democratic legitimacy since it refuses the principle of a mandatory review of the financial framework at the next legislature of Parliament, denying the newly elected MEPs in 2014 to have any input into the MFF which will cover the entire duration of the next legislature.

Guy Verhofstadt, ALDE group leader, said: "The Council would be wrong to make the Parliament play the role of the villain. We are not asking for a penny more than the amount decided upon by the Member States, but it's a minimum in a parliamentary system to ask that the deputies elected by the European citizens also be able to determine their spending priorities. We are in this problematic in the first place because the EU budget is funded by national budgets. This is why we demand more than ever that we move forward on the system of own resources so that the EU has its autonomous financing, faire and transparent, and that it be comprehensible to European citizens. This will not increase the cost to taxpayers, but on the contrary will reduce the pressure put on national budgets."

Anne Jensen (Venstre, Denmark), ALDE chief negotiator, added: "It's extremely frustrating after three meetings to see so little progress and I do not see how we will be able to conclude on June 11, as requested by the Irish Presidency. The Council refuses any provision of a mandatory review, and even rejects in advance any concrete consequences of such a review. Regarding flexibility, the Presidency has absolutely nothing new, even though the Parliament is firmly committed to maximum flexibility both in payments and commitments, so as to assure that budgetary resources be used in the most appropriate manner. "

Jan Mulder (VVD, Netherlands), ALDE coordinator in the Budget Committee, added: "Over the past ten years, the budgets of twenty seven Member States have increased much more than the EU budget despite the admission of the twelve new Member States and soon to be thirteen. The fiscal and budgetary realities call for Parliament's prerogatives to be fully respected. We do not ask more money, but rather that it be spent more wisely. It is certainly not the member states, whose management of the agricultural and structural funds has been scrutinized for the past 18 years by the Court of Auditors, who

should teach us lessons. "

George Lyon (LibDem, UK), Vice Chairman of the Parliamentary Budget Committee concluded: "Given the economic situation which Member States are facing, ALDE does not dispute the total amount agreed upon by the heads of state and government. What we do need, however, is a modern budget which will support growth, employment and competitiveness across the EU. One of the areas which needs to be looked at is a shift in resources from other areas of the budget, in order to strengthen priorities in research, development and innovation as well as capital and infrastructure projects, such as the digital, transport and energy agenda under the Connecting Europe Facility."