

EU demands Britain pays £2.5bn to plug massive black hole in budget



Britain could be forced to hand an extra £2.5billion to Brussels to help plug a massive black hole in the EU budget, it has emerged. In a dramatic admission, EU Budget Commissioner Janusz Lewandowski said Brussels overspent its budget by an astonishing £20billion last year.

Mr Lewandowski, who blamed the situation on late invoices, said the cash would be taken from this year's budget in the short term. But officials conceded it was almost certain to lead to a request for a bailout later this year, making a mockery of claims that the EU budget has been brought under control.

A request on this scale would cost British taxpayers about £2.5billion this year – more than the entire annual budget of the Foreign Office.

The revelation prompted an angry response in Britain, where David Cameron claims he has curbed EU spending.

Tory MEP Marta Andreasen, a member of the European Parliament's budget committee, said it was astonishing that the EU was asking for more money just three months after it was granted an emergency £10billion top-up to allow it to balance its books.

Miss Andreasen, a former chief accountant at the European Commission, condemned the EU's 'utter incompetence' and 'continued disdain with which it treats taxpayers' money'.

She said European taxpayers '*should not be throwing more money away on failing policy areas*', and added: '*It seems the*

European Commission is not only unwilling but is also completely unable to live within the means agreed. It repeatedly comes back, blaming others and looking for more cash.'

Bill Cash, Tory chairman of the Commons European scrutiny committee, described the situation as 'completely unacceptable', and said Britain should refuse any demand for more money.

He added: *'They are stretching the patience of the British taxpayer beyond breaking point.'*

'We cannot go on just paying up every time they come back with their begging bowl.'

Pawel Swidlicki, of the think-tank Open Europe, said it was time Brussels put its affairs in order rather than demanding even more cash from Britain. He added: 'This highlights the shocking lack of long-term planning or adequate controls in the EU budget. Any shortfall should be made up from future EU budgets rather than via a fresh top-up from member states.'

'The budget needs to be radically slimmed down and overhauled – ending the pointless recycling of regeneration funds among the EU's richest members would be a good start.'

The UK Treasury is expected to oppose any extra cash for Brussels, as it did with last year's demand for £10 billion. But the decision is made by qualified majority voting and Brussels sources say the UK is likely to be out-voted, as it was last year.