Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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Opinion 179 (1994)[1]

Council of Europe general accounts and budgets for the years 1992, 1994 and 1995

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The 1995 Council of Europe budget is being prepared in the context of implementation of the decisions taken by the summit of heads of state and government of Council of Europe member states held in Vienna on 8 and 9 October 1993, which confirmed the Council of Europe's identity as a political body open to all European democracies.

2. The summit also underlined the desire to foster the integration of new member states (Estonia, Lithuania and Slovenia acceded on 14 May 1993, the Slovak and Czech Republics on 30 June and Romania on 7 October) and undertake necessary institutional reforms.

3. The 1995 budget must therefore take this political objective into account, together with the inevitable administrative consequences it entails, both for the programme of activities and working methods and for human and financial resources.

4. Consequently,

A. With regard to the Council of Europe general accounts for 1992, the Assembly:

a. is satisfied with the opinion of the Board of Auditors which certified that the general accounts were accurate and in keeping with the rules, as were those of the Cultural Fund, the Sports Fund and the European Youth Foundation and, in particular, that financial management had been conducted with a commendable sense of economy;

b. supports the recommendations of the Board of Auditors and the Secretary General's intentions with regard to the implementation of the new information management strategy and new computerised accounting and staff management systems;

c. asks that all Council of Europe member states pay their contributions within the time limits set, failing which the penalties incurred may even be increased. If states enjoying special guest status fail to fulfil their financial obligations to the Council, they should be excluded from the activities in which they would normally participate and, in cases where they have applied for membership, the procedure should be suspended pending payment of the amounts due;

B. With regard to the 1994 budget, the Assembly:

a. has mixed feelings over the budget increase (5,40%), which has considerably diminished in relation to the three previous years (10% on average), despite the Council of Europe having to face up to new tasks and new objectives;

b. expresses its concern over cutbacks in certain sectors such as Vote I (common expenditure) or Vote II (intergovernmental programme of activities) which are both vital to the proper running of the Council, particularly in the light of the foregoing statement;

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1. See Doc. 7057, report of the Committee on the Budget and the Intergovernmental Work Programme, Rapporteur: Mr Cox. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 18 May 1994.

c.welcomes the increase in the Organisation's staff which will go part of the way to remedying the permanent structural deficit in staff. This deficit is resulting in a work overload for the Secretariat, which cannot go on performing its tasks effectively, particularly where implementation of the decisions adopted at the Vienna Summit is concerned;

C.With regard to its own budget for 1994, the Assembly:

a.appreciates the fact that several of its requests have been taken into account, resulting in the sustained growth of its budget (7,69%) and share of the general budget (8,28%);

b.welcomes the creation of a number of new posts, which will make it possible to consolidate the Office of the Clerk of the Assembly and better deploy its staff, particularly for its new tasks involving the countries of central and eastern Europe;

D.With regard to the budget prospects for 1995, the Assembly:

a.wishes detailed consideration to be undertaken, to which it would be willing to contribute, as to future policy on the continued enlargement of the Council of Europe and the budgetary consequences for the Organisation;

b.believes it essential that, following the decisions taken at the Vienna Summit, all the necessary resources be made available to the Council of Europe so that it might perform its new task of guaranteeing democratic security;

c.hopes that the policy of consolidating the Secretariat (notably through permanent staff) will be pursued, with a view to running new activities falling to the Organisation as effectively as possible: reform of the European Convention on Human Rights supervision machinery; protection of national minorities; the campaign to combat racism, xenophobia, antiSemitism and intolerance; setting up of a Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe;

d.asks member states, in these circumstances, to pursue coherent policies, given that their contributions and the Council of Europe budget as a whole are of modest proportions in contrast to the considerably expanded role of the Council in integrating new democracies and guaranteeing democratic stability and security;

e.proposes that Council of Europe budgetary policy be geared henceforth to medium-term planning, which will obviate the need for annual policy rethinks and smooth the way for more effective implementation of the Organisation's activities and, in particular, compliance with the decisions already taken by the Committee of Ministers on both institutional and operational matters;

f.welcomes the opportunity to send a representative to meetings of the Ad hoc Working Group on the revision of the method of calculating the scale of member states' contributions and hopes that this revision, while maintaining the criteria of fairness, proportionality and solidarity, will be chiefly geared to improving the funding of the Council of Europe;

g.reiterates the wish that, in the statutory improvements to be made, due account be taken of its proposals, particularly those concerning its budgetary powers;

h.hopes to see the completion of projects aimed at providing the Council of Europe with modern, efficient and computerised management tools for both accounting and staff management and that computer resources will be properly developed to this end;

i. also hopes that a special effort will be made to improve the working conditions (notably in terms of offices and meeting rooms) of not only the Secretariat but also its own members and governmental experts;

j.stresses the importance of establishing a real Council of Europe communication policy, making European citizens aware of its objectives and achievements, particularly as far as central and east European countries are concerned, and welcomes, in this connection, the setting up of Council of Europe information centres in these countries, an initiative it hopes will be consolidated upon;

k.emphasises its keen support for the objective of a European civil service and wishes to help strengthen the legal protection of Council of Europe staff and extend their statutory rights.