Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Opinion 197 (1996)[1]

Expenditure of the Assembly for the budgetary financial year 1997

Parliamentary Assembly

1. As it did in Opinion No. 192 (1995) on the budgets of the Council of Europe for the financial years 1995 and 1996, the Assembly reiterates its wish to see the Organisation's budget increased whenever another state becomes a member. Only in this way will the Council of Europe be able to give effect to its pan-European dimension and fulfil its task of guaranteeing Europe's democratic security.

2. Since the Assembly adopted, in May 1995, Opinion No. 187 (1995) on its own 1996 budget, five new members have joined the Council of Europe (Albania, Moldova, Russia, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Ukraine). The number of members of the Assembly has therefore grown from 478 to 562.

3. As the Bureau of the Assembly granted special guest status to the Parliament of Armenia on 26 January 1996 and to the Parliament of Georgia on 28 May 1996, the number of special guest parliamentarians has risen to twenty-four. Counting the six Israeli observers, there are now 592 members of parliament involved in the Assembly's work.

4. In the course of 1996, other states may join the Council, or their parliaments may be granted special guest status by the Assembly.

5. The rise in the number of members of the Assembly has gone hand in hand with an increase in activities and responsibilities, especially in respect of the monitoring of compliance with the obligations and commitments entered into by member states.

6. The Assembly considers it essential to guarantee the quality of its work, both in plenary session and in committee.

7. Improving working conditions means tackling the language question. The Assembly wishes to make Russian a working language, in the same way as German and Italian. Furthermore, with a view to publicising the texts it adopts more effectively, the Assembly would like them to be translated into its current working languages and into Russian.

8. The Assembly wishes to make its work better known and to improve its research resources. Via its Internet server, it wishes to make its public documents and information about its own activities and those of its committees available to its own members, national parliaments, governments and the public.

9. The enlargement process has also had repercussions for political groups. Their numbers of members have risen, and their role within the Assembly has considerably increased.

10. The programme of interparliamentary co-operation must be stepped up so as better to meet the needs of new member states' parliaments.

11. The Assembly is endeavouring to make the best possible use of the resources available to it and to adapt its structures and working methods. It is, for example, currently giving thought to a reorganisation of plenary sessions of the Assembly and the scheduling of committee meetings.

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1. Assembly debate on 27 June 1996 (23rd Sitting) (see Doc. 7579, report by the Committee on the Budget and the Intergovernmental Work Programme, rapporteur: Mr Theis). Text adopted by the Assembly on 27 June 1996 (23rd Sitting).

12. The Assembly believes that it is necessary, as soon as possible:

12.1. to increase the staff of the Table Office;

12.2. to increase the staff of the committee secretariats;

12.3. to consolidate the unit monitoring member states' commitments;

12.4. to set up a basic documentation and research service;

12.5. to publicise the Assembly's work more effectively and establish a press unit;

12.6. to improve the reimbursement of parliamentarians' expenses incurred during the missions carried out on behalf of the Council of Europe from the budget of the Organisation, in order to avoid any selection by money on this type of activity;

12.7. to continue the upgrading of the Assembly's computer facilities;

12.8. to make the political groups more effective;

12.9. to improve the working conditions of the Assembly and its committees, including the language situation.

13. The Assembly must have additional human and material resources in order to cater for all these needs. Higher appropriations than those allocated in 1996 are therefore necessary.

14. Appended to this opinion are:

14.1. a table of requested increases for 1997 compared with the appropriations for 1996;

14.2. brief explanations of the changes.