Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Opinion 211 (1999)[1]
Final version

Budgets of the Council of Europe for the financial years 1999 and 2000

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly welcomes the Committee of Ministers' declaration of its willingness to deepen further its regular consultation with Assembly representatives on all issues of common interest in the budgetary and administrative fields, including as regards the fixing of the Organisation's overall budget. However, the Assembly considers that the first experience with the new procedure has not been entirely satisfactory, in that it did not fully meet the Assembly's expectations, as set out in Recommendation 1344 (1997). The Assembly indeed believes that its contribution on behalf of the budgetary and administrative affairs of the Organisation has over the years greatly helped the Committee of Ministers in identifying new priority areas. This is why the Assembly's proposal to set up a small joint working group, composed of Assembly representatives and the Committee of Ministers, could be particularly helpful.

2. The Assembly therefore reiterates its request to be more involved in the future in the preparation of the Organisation's budget, in particular as regards its own budget (Vote III).

3. The Assembly feels genuine concern over what it perceives as a certain lack of solidarity among member states as regards the scale of their contributions to the ordinary budget. Resolution (94) 31, by virtue of which the rate of contributions of the five grands payeurs has been reduced to only 12.80% of the ordinary budget, has served further to aggravate the situation of less well-to-do member states and to bog down the Committee of Ministers in time-consuming and sometimes divisive deliberations.

4. The Assembly welcomes the idea of introducing a revised budget structure and reporting system based on a clearer definition of priorities for the Organisation. No longer will the budget be a simple authorisation to spend, but rather a commitment to delivering specific services on the basis of a close linkage between objectives and resources allocated. However, the Assembly harbours the most serious misgivings as regards the appropriateness of applying a strictly results-based budgeting method to the Assembly, the Council's political forum par excellence, without taking into full account its specific character and needs. Preserving the Assembly's unique ability to respond quickly and aptly to new, unexpected challenges is indeed a priority.

5. The Assembly wishes to draw the Committee of Ministers' attention to the importance it attaches to staff policies (flexible job management, leaving allowances, early retirement, and creation of temporary structural posts). In view of the vastly increased tasks and challenges facing the Council of Europe in the new, much wider membership, it is essential that it be able to rely on an independent, very highly educated, competent and motivated secretariat of the highest calibre.

6. The Assembly, referring to Resolution (92) 28, adopted by the Committee of Ministers to "speed up the renewal of the Organisation's human resources and at the same time facilitate the orderly progress of careers", considers that the implementation of the report of the Committee of Wise Persons, which recommends establishing new priorities for the Organisation and restructuring the Secretariat, fully justifies the

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee,* acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 30 March 1999. See Doc. 8343, report of the Committee on the Budget, rapporteur: Mr Aleffi.

provisions laid down in this resolution. The Committee of Ministers should therefore, in the interests of the Organisation, invite the Secretary General to submit a plan of measures for the termination of service in accordance with this resolution.

7. With regard to the 1999 budget :

The Assembly:

i. notes with concern that the 1999 budget was limited to a minimum increase in resources, signifying a stabilisation in the general level of expenditure for the second year in a row. This budgetary trend, if prolonged, cannot but have a negative impact on the overall functioning of the Organisation;

ii. is deeply concerned that, in the 1999 budget, most of the additional appropriations were allocated to the establishment of the new European Court of Human Rights. Given the budgetary implications of the Court's growing financial needs for the Organisation's various other sectors – Assembly, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Intergovernmental Programme of Activities, and so on – the Committee of Ministers should consider the possibility of making separate budgetary provision for the Court, as already asked for in Opinion No. 203 (1997). This would avert the risk of certain activities and priorities being adversely affected by the enlarged tasks entrusted to this newly-established body;

iii. welcomes the Committee of Ministers' decision to use the unspent appropriations in the 1997 budget for certain activities, in particular co-operation with the OSCE;

iv. regrets that, for the second consecutive year, the Committee of Ministers did not see fit to meet the Assembly's requests as regards its own budget (Vote III) amounting to some 5 million French francs but instead accorded it barely over 1 million French francs, and this at a time when the Assembly was entrusted with increasingly demanding tasks;

8. With regard to the budgetary prospects for 2000:

The Assembly:

i. believes that, with zero real growth in the 2000 budget, it will not be possible for the Council of Europe to accomplish the tasks with which it is entrusted and that the level of resources will have to be increased to ensure that there are no serious repercussions on many of the Organisation's activities, including in priority fields;

ii. reiterates its view that the Council of Europe must be given financial resources commensurate with the Organisation's pan-European mission. One possibility to achieve this could be to create a special "Council of Europe" heading within national budgets, and another to let the ministries concerned, such as those engaged in social, cultural and legal activities, contribute to the financing of certain intergovernmental programmes, as already asked for in Opinion No. 199 (1996);

iii. encourages the Committee of Ministers to reach a rapid decision in favour of the establishment of a privately managed pension fund, as requested by Assembly Recommendation 1391 (1998), that would guarantee the payment of pensions to staff members. The savings reached as a result of the transfer from the French social security system to a private insurance scheme should, over the coming years, be used to make such a fund financially viable and self-sufficient;

iv. supports the Committee of Ministers' efforts to identify future priorities in the light of the recommendations contained in the report of the Committee of Wise Persons, favouring a more rational use of resources;

v. invites the Committee of Ministers to carry out a study on the possibility of introducing a two-year budgeting procedure, such as exists in several other international institutions, with the aim of enabling the Organisation better to formulate and implement its activities, as previously requested in Opinions Nos. 199 (1996) and 203 (1997);

vi. calls upon the Committee of Ministers to make special budgetary provision for the financial implications of the topics of the action plan adopted by the second summit still awaiting their implementation as well as of the future political decisions they entail, in particular the creation of the office of the Commissioner for Human Rights;

vii. calls upon the Committee of Ministers to enhance the current co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union and to reinforce the Secretariat stationed in Brussels.