Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Opinion 212 (1999)[1]

Expenditure of the Assembly for the financial year 2000

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Following the Strasbourg Summit and the report of the Wise Persons (Building Greater Europe without dividing lines), the aim in the financial year 2000 should be to enable the Council of Europe, and in particular its Parliamentary Assembly, to make an even fuller contribution to the well-being of Europe.

2. The Assembly deeply regrets that the Committee of Ministers only to a very limited extent met its budgetary requests for 1999, as set out in its Opinion No. 206 (1998). The Assembly was granted an increase of barely over 1 million French francs – as compared with the 5 075 000 FF or 6.09% increase requested for 1999 – representing an increase of some 1.6%, of which 663 000 FF will go toward the creation of a new A-grade post. The Assembly, although aware of the financial difficulties of some member states, in the year 2000 wishes to be given the additional human and financial resources needed to render its current committee structure better prepared to face its enlarged mission and new challenges. Greater recourse may also have to be made to temporary staff on a secondment or fixed-term contract basis for specific projects and activities.

3. The Assembly continues to be a strong advocate of reform, as witnessed by its constant effort to achieve rationalisation and a better use of its limited resources. However, it is increasingly concerned that the principle of zero growth, which is likely to be applied even for the year 2000, could seriously reduce its capacity to function efficiently.

4. For the year 2000 and onwards, the Assembly believes that the Committee of Ministers will have to increasingly concentrate on ensuring that the Organisation as a whole has the financial means to continue to play its important role on behalf of Europe. It follows that the Assembly's proposals for the year 2000 must take into account the financial deficit so far incurred and be tailored to the future, notably in terms of the goals set by the Second Summit and the direction the Organisation is likely to take following the Wise Persons report.

5. The Assembly, being the Organisation's parliamentary organ, stresses that since its budgetary estimates are particularly modest in comparison with the Council of Europe's general budget, it should not have financial constraints jeopardising its smooth functioning, in particular when it comes to fostering parliamentary democracy, political pluralism, respect for human rights and the environment as well as undertaking monitoring procedures in certain member states.

6. It recalls that, given the Assembly's responsibility to complete the enlargement process in the coming years, additional financial and human resources are required to enable it to cope with its important task and to adapt its internal structure to the changing needs of its enlarged membership.

7. The Assembly wishes to recruit programme staff on limited duration contracts (structural posts) in connection with specific programmes, in particular for its co-operation and monitoring programme with a view to including in its Secretariat nationals of as many of its member states as possible.

8. It wishes to take full advantage of the possibilities offered by the mass and electronic media in order to make its public documents and information material available to its members, national parliaments, governments and the public and to establish in this respect a Research and Documentation Unit.

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1. See Doc. 8344, report of the Committee on the Budget, rapporteur: Mr Aleffi Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 30 March 1999.

9. The enlargement process has also had important consequences for the Assembly's political groups. Their Secretariat resources need to be enhanced, considering that the membership of each political group has increased, as has their role in the Assembly. A gradual increase in their financial resources will therefore be crucial.

10. Since over 60% of the funds of the Assembly's co-operation programme are now used to cover the costs pertaining to tasks that have become central to the Assembly's mission, namely new accessions, country monitoring and the observation of elections, the Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to include the resources allocated to the co-operation and monitoring programme within its budgetary package.

Appended to this opinion are:

1. a table of requested increases for the year 2000 compared with the appropriations for 1999;

2. brief explanations for the changes.

Appendix

VOTE III – EXPENDITURE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

VOTE III of the ordinary budget – Expenditure of the Assembly	Appropriations for 1999	Changes in real terms proposed for 2000
	FF	FF
HEAD 3.1 – Staff		
Sub-heads		
3101 – Salary, allowances and social charges of the Clerk of the Assembly	1 133 000	
3102 – Remuneration of staff recruited on established posts	40 995 000	+ 1 164 000
3103 – Recruitment, arrival and departure expenses – Home leave 481 000	481 000	
3104 – Overtime – statutory and other allowances	140 000	
3105 – Remuneration and accessory charges of temporary staff	23 075 000	+ 1 000 000
3106 – Provision for adjustment to remuneration		
3107 – National parliamentary officials on secondment to the Assembly	400 000	+ 200 000
TOTAL HEAD 3.1	66 224 000	+ 2 364 000
HEAD 3.2 – Allocation to the Assembly's political groups		
3201 – Allocation to the Assembly's political group	4 030 000	+ 350 000
HEAD 3.3 – Supplies, services and other operational		
Sub-heads		
3301 – Publishing and printing	4 900 000	+ 900 000
3302 – Official expenses of the President of the Assembly	535 000	+ 15 000
3303 – Expenditure pertaining to the Private Office of the President of the Assembly	500 000	+ 50 000
3304 – Representational expenditure, other official expenditure and travelling expenses of members of the Assembly	1 300 000	
3305 – Official journeys	1 700 000	
3306 – Expenses for inviting parliamentary delegations of non-member states and other guests	1 404 000	
3307 – Consultation of experts	500 000	
3308 – Organisation of ad hoc conferences	900 000	
3309 – Grant to the International Institute for Democracy	250 000	
3310 – Other expenditure not specifically provided for in this vote	330 000	
3311 – Modernisation of the Assembly's equipment	p.m.	
3312 – European prizes	400 000	+ 100 000
3313 - Operating and maintenance cost of the new electronic voting system	230 000	
3314 - Co-operation and monitoring program	3 700 000	+ 1 600 00

VOTE III of the ordinary budget – Expenditure of the Assembly	Appropriations for 1999	Changes in real terms proposed for 2000
TOTAL HEAD 3.3	16 649 000	+ 2 665 000
TOTAL VOTE III	86 903 000	+ 5 379 000

HEAD 3.1 – STAFF

Sub-head 3101 – Salary, allowances and social charges of the Clerk of the Assembly

The 2000 appropriations for this sub-head should be maintained at the same level in real terms as in 1999.

Sub-head 3102 – Remuneration of staff recruited on established posts

This appropriation covers the basic salaries, allowances (both non-recurring and periodic) and social insurance of the permanent staff of the Office of the Clerk, which comprises the following 75 posts:

This appropriation covers the basic salaries, allowances (both non-recurring and periodic) and social insurance of the permanent staff of the Office of the Clerk, which comprises the following 75 posts:

3 A6 posts,

8 A5 posts,

13 A4 posts,

17 A2/A3 posts,

1 B6 post,

6 B5 posts,

10 B4 posts,

15 B3 posts,

2 B2 posts.

The proposed staffing changes for 2000 would meet the Assembly's enhanced structural requirements as described in previous Assembly Opinions and form part of a longer-term strategy designed to rationalise the structure of the Office of the Clerk.

As already stated in Opinions No. 197 (1996), No. 201 (1997) and No. 206 (1998), for the Assembly's committees to be fully operational, it is necessary that:

the 9 committees with 65 members (and 65 alternates) to have at least 3 grade A staff (a secretary at A5 level and two co-secretaries, A4 or A2/3), one B4 administrative assistant and one B2/B3 official;

the 5 committees with 45 members (and 45 alternates) to have two grade A staff (one secretary, A4 and one co-secretary, A2/A3), one B4 administrative assistant and one B2/B3 official.

This would give a total of 37 grade A staff and 28 grade B staff, compared with the current establishment of 31 A-grade officials (6 A5, 11 A4, and 14 A2/A3) and 20 B-grade staff (2 B5, 7 B4, 9 B3 and 2 B2) serving the Assembly's committees.

Reform of the committee secretariats in conformity with the principles set out above would therefore entail the following creations of posts, amounting at 1999 rates to 6 422 000 FF:

3 x A5 post (2 253 000 FF)

3 x A2/A3 posts (1 488 000 FF)

7 x B4 posts (2 394 000 FF)

1 x B2 post (287 000 FF)

The Assembly, fully aware of the budgetary situation of some member states, believes that its more comprehensive reform, as proposed in its Opinion 206 (1998), should be further postponed in the hope that European economic growth will soon accelerate in the course of 1999. It is in this spirit that it formulates its

requests, which include some upgradings of existing posts and the creation of two A2/A3 posts. The latter would most likely be used to recruit nationals of those countries that are not yet represented in the Clerk's Office.

At 1999 rates, the cost of these proposed modifications amounts to 1 164 000 FF.

2 upgradings from A4 to A5 (52 000 FF)

1 upgrading A3 to A4 (27 000 FF)

1 upgrading from B5 to B6 (19 000 FF)

3 upgradings from B3 to B4 (48 000 FF)

2 upgradings from B2 to B3 (26 000 FF)

Creation of two A2/A3 posts (992 000 FF)

2 upgradings from A4 to A5 (52 000 FF) and 1 upgrading A3 to A4 (27 000 FF)

In a situation where budgetary growth has in recent years been extremely modest, many A-grade staff members are effectively blocked in their career paths. This is all the more to be regretted when they serve one of the nine major committees with 65 members (and 65 alternates) in a dedicated and competent manner, and have reached an age where promotion is fully justifiable. This proposal is in line with the special procedure for reclassification contained in the report of the Wise Persons (Appendix I, reviewing the organisation and management of the Secretariat). Careers are – together with work content and the Organisation's prestige – an important factor both for the recruitment of qualified, independent new staff and for the retention of existing staff who might be tempted to leave the Clerk's Office for other departments within the Organisation or to leave the Council altogether. Career prospects are also vital to ensure that the Clerk's staff members remain motivated to do a good job for their committees and the Assembly as a whole.

Creation of two A2/A3 posts (992 000 FF)

This request is in line with the principle of a more thorough reform of the committee secretariat, set out in Opinion No. 206 (1998). The ultimate goal of this reform would be to render the Assembly's overall functioning more efficient and responsive to new challenges. These creations would most likely be used to recruit nationals of those countries that are not yet represented in the Clerk's Office.

1 upgrading from B5 to B6 (19 000 FF)

The request for the upgrading of a B5 post to B6 appeared already in Opinion No. 201 (1997) and Opinion No. 206 (1998).

The responsibilities and workload of the person in charge of the administrative and secretarial unit of the Table Office have multiplied considerably in recent years. This staff member supervises a team of secretaries and is responsible for the registration and publication of all Assembly documents, especially those on the agenda of the Assembly plenary sessions and of Standing Committee meetings, and for the material preparation of amendments. By way of example, the number of documents increased from 237 in 1995 to 282 in 1998, whereas the number of amendments went from 261 to 485 over the same period. This staff member is also responsible for compiling and updating the biographies of Assembly members, the list of national delegations and of committee and sub-committee membership.

3 upgradings from B3 to B4 (48 000 FF)

2 upgradings from B2 to B3 (26 000 FF)

It should be noted that the responsibilities and workload of officials responsible for the administrative and secretarial back-up of committees have increased significantly in recent years. In addition to their normal secretarial duties, B-grade staff working in Clerk's Office:

> *are responsible for the co-ordination of A-grade administrative activities (official journeys/diary appointments/reports/ drafting/agendas);*
>
> *act as intermediaries between the committee chairpersons, their secretariats, other Parliamentary Assembly members and the committee secretariat as regards practical administrative matters in the absence of A-grades (ie when A-grade staff are on official journeys, leave, etc);*

are often called upon to act as repositories of basic information for their committee secretariat in respect of new A and B-grade staff, in view of their often sound and extensive committee experience;

are responsible for the involvement and training of other B-grade staff as regards their committee's specific tasks;

are often responsible for counselling trainees and study visitors;

bear major responsibilities in the administrative and practical preparation of special events organised by their committees, often resulting in long working hours.

It can thus be seen that important gaps remain for both A-grade and B-grade staff members as regards their grades and their duties. For example, the tasks carried out by committee assistants often correspond more to the duties of administrative assistants (B4/B5/B6) than to those of secretarial assistants (B1/B2/B3). It was against this background that the Assembly, in its Opinion No. 206 (1998), proposed a thorough, albeit progressive, reorganisation of the committee structure – a reform which has become absolutely necessary in order to cope with the increasingly demanding tasks entrusted to the staff of the Office of the Clerk, in particular to B-grade personnel.

Sub-head 3103 – Recruitment, arrival and departure expenses – Home leave

Sub-head 3104 – Overtime – Statutory and other allowances

The 2000 appropriations for sub-heads 3103 and 3104 should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 1999.

Sub-head 3105 – Remuneration and accessory charges of temporary staff

An increase of around 1 000 000 FF is required to cover the increase in interpretation costs resulting from the creation of the new Assembly committee and from the need to reinforce the team of interpreters and of the Table Office during sessions of the Assembly. Furthermore, all Assembly documents, before becoming available to the public, have to be proof-read by a native speaker. This new procedure will entail the creation of two proof-reading posts, one English and one French, at B4 or B5 level, corresponding to the administrative level of proof-readers in Seddoc.

Sub-head 3106 – Provision for adjustments to remuneration

Sub-head 3107 – Secondment of national civil servants to the Assembly

In 1997 the Assembly established new links with the national parliaments by inviting them to second their officials to the Assembly. This practice, which was continued in 1998 and 1999, is proving very useful and successful. The seconded officials have contributed substantially to the work of the Table Office and the committee secretariats. The appropriation for 1998 and 1999 assumed the secondment of only two officials. Taking into consideration the present and future needs of the Assembly this number should be increased to three in 2000. An increase of 200 000 FF for 2000 is therefore requested for this purpose. Moreover, the Assembly points out that the rules governing the secondment of national officials, established by the Committee of Ministers, do not meet the specific requirements expressed by a number of national parliaments. It therefore suggests that its Bureau establish new, specific rules on the secondment of parliamentary officials.

HEAD 3.2 – ALLOCATION TO THE ASSEMBLY'S POLITICAL GROUPS

Sub-head 3201 – Allocation to the Assembly's political groups

The Assembly's political groups play an increasingly important role in the activities of the Assembly. This role has been crucial in enabling the Assembly to maintain its operational capacity and organisational efficiency, as it has had to absorb the practical consequences of the enlargement of the Organisation. However, if the political groups are to play a full role, they need to be adequately staffed in terms of both level and numbers. In the medium term, a progressive increase over several financial years should be aimed at allowing each group to recruit one administrative officer and one secretarial assistant.

The allocation to the political groups is calculated on the basis of a lump sum for secretarial assistance to each of the existing groups and an additional per capita allocation according to the membership of each group. Appropriations for 1997, 1998 and 1999 amounted to 4 030 000 FF. Each group received a fixed allowance of 135 000 FF and an additional per capita allowance (some 6 000 FF per member).

In its Opinion No. 206 (1998) the Assembly asked for a modest increase of 70 000 FF per group (350 000 FF in total) to cover the cost of one half-time administrative officer. However, this request was not granted. For 2000, an increase of 70 000 FF in the fixed allowance of each group is once again requested. The total increase requested is, therefore, 350 000 FF (5 x 70 000 FF), with the intention that this lump sum allocation for secretarial services will be gradually built up further in the coming years.

It should also be borne in mind for the future that, with the increase in membership of the Assembly, there has been a parallel increase in the number of members who are not affiliated to an existing political group. Proposals for the possible creation of new political groups cannot therefore be ruled out. It is obvious that the existing appropriations under this sub-head would need to be revised accordingly.

HEAD 3.3 – SUPPLIES, SERVICES AND OTHER OPERATIONAL EXPENDITURE

Since 1975, the appropriations under the following sub-heads have been voted as a lump sum (budgetary package). The various amounts in this package may subsequently be altered under Article 31 of the Financial Regulations.

The total requests of the Assembly for the 2000 budgetary package amount to an increase of 2 665 000 FF. However, the Assembly wishes to stress that since 1993, despite its request for inflation indexing of these appropriations, no such increase has been granted.

In a situation where the Assembly is entrusted with an increasing number of more and more complex tasks – and where a new European political and economic architecture is being created as a result of the progress of democratic governance, the rule of law and economic efficiency – the Assembly believes it indispensable to include the co-operation and monitoring programme's budget within the Assembly's budgetary package.

Sub-head 3301 – Publishing and printing

Publishing and printing costs in the last three years amounted to 4 MF. Since 1997 the Clerk's Office has regularly prepared and published – in both electronic and paper form – the newsletter entitled "The Europeans". With the constantly increasing number of Assembly documents to be printed, and with new publications of the Assembly coming on-stream, it is almost impossible to reduce the global cost of printing. Added to these are the future costs of putting in an electronic form the Assembly's parliamentary archives. Therefore an increase of 900 000 FF under this sub-head is required.

Sub-head 3304 – Representational expenditure, other official expenditure and travelling expenses of members of the Assembly

The 2000 appropriation for sub-head 3304 should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 1999.

Sub-head 3305 – Official journeys

The 2000 appropriation for sub-head 3305 should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 1999.

Sub-head 3306 – Expenses for inviting parliamentary delegations of non-member states and other guests

The 2000 appropriation for sub-head 3306 should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 1999.

Sub-head 3307 – Consultation of experts

The 2000 appropriation for sub-head 3307 should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 1999.

Sub-head 3308 – Organisation of ad hoc conferences

The 2000 appropriation for sub-head 3308 should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 1999.

Sub-head 3309 – Grant to the International Institute for Democracy

The 2000 appropriation for sub-head 3309 should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 1999.

Sub-head 3310 – Other expenditure not specifically provided for in this vote

The 2000 appropriation for sub-head 3310 should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 1999.

Sub-head 3311 – Modernisation of the Assembly's equipment – p.m.

Sub-head 3312 – European prizes

In December 1997, the Assembly decided to sponsor the "Young Europe" category of the "Prix Europe for Television". The cost of this prize amounts to 75 000 FF annually. An increase of 25 000 FF would enable the activities of the Council of Europe and the Assembly to be publicised more effectively at ceremonies for the presentation of these prizes as well as of flags and plaques of honour. Moreover, the cost of the "Museum Prize" has significantly grown in the last two years. Therefore a total increase of 100 000 FF is necessary under this sub-head.

In its Opinion No. 206 (1998) the Assembly asked for this modest increase of 100 000 FF to cover the costs of new prizes. However, this request was not granted.

Sub-head 3313 – Operating and maintenance costs of the new electronic voting system

The 2000 appropriation for sub-head 3313 should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 1999.

Sub-head 3314 – Co-operation and monitoring programme

In the past, the aim of the co-operation programme of the Assembly was to foster the political integration of many central and eastern European countries into the European mainstream, through such activities as special training courses for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, seminars and the provision of legislative and technical assistance. As a result of the widening of the Council of Europe's membership, the character of the co-operation programme has changed radically – especially compared with 1995, when the separate budgetary sub-head that finances all these inter-parliamentary activities was established. Over 60% of the funds of the Assembly's co-operation programme are now used to cover the costs resulting from tasks that have become central to the Assembly's role, namely country monitoring and the observation of elections. This programme has made a major contribution to the consolidation of democratic institutions in the member states.

Another point is worth making. With the introduction of a results-based budgetary system it would be easier for the Assembly to define its tasks and objectives within a budgetary package enlarged in this way. The co-operation and monitoring programme is an integral part of the Assembly's activities and it would therefore be unfortunate if it were kept as a separate item. If the Assembly's budgetary package and co-operation programme are not placed under a single budget heading, then the new budget structure – which is based on the linkage between performance and objectives on the one hand, and resources allocated to attain the latter on the other – could become a straitjacket. The Assembly would then be unable to take any additional, unforeseen political initiatives and might as a result be seen to be failing in its political mission. It is a primary role of the Assembly to keep abreast of world political changes by gearing its initiatives to the constantly evolving political conditions within its enlarged membership. The Assembly therefore proposes that the "Co-operation and monitoring programme" item be integrated into its budgetary package and that its endowment be increased in the order of 1 600 000 FF, necessary not only to restore its 1996 level, (the budget having been reduced in the years 1997, 1998 and 1999), but also to recoup the financial loss in purchasing power due to the non-indexation of these appropriations. Such an increase will enable the Assembly to complete the Organisation's enlargement process and to reinforce the staff of the Political Affairs and Monitoring Committees, responsible for country accessions, monitoring procedures and observation of elections, with two structural A-grade posts, with a limited duration of 2/3 years. This proposal is consistent with point 18.ii.d of the Opinion No. 208 (1999) on the report presented by the Committee of Wise Persons in which the Assembly asked for more autonomy in the management of budgetary and administrative matters.