Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Opinion 218 (2000)[1]

Budgets of the Council of Europe for the financial years 2000 and 2001

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly, convinced that the Council of Europe does not possess the financial resources necessary to carry out its activities and that the major problem lies in the fact that the financing method established by Committee of Ministers Resolution (94) 31 has proved inadequate for ensuring a stable and sufficient flow of funds (particularly following the reform of the European Court of Human Rights and the creation of Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights) urges the Committee of Ministers to develop possible alternative ways of financing the Organisation, in particular as regards the introduction of a higher minimum level of contribution to the ordinary budget, covering the cost of a member state's membership of the European Court of Human Rights, and of a fixed-rate contribution for Observer states.

2. The Assembly strongly deplores the rigid application of "zero real growth" even for the year 2000, which would have an undesirable impact on the overall functioning of the Organisation.

3. The Assembly draws the Committee of Ministers' attention to the Court's ever-increasing financial needs, which could adversely affect the Organisation's various other sectors, including the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, and the Intergovernmental Programme of Activities. The Committee of Ministers should consider making separate budgetary provision for the Court, as already proposed by Assembly Opinions No. 203 (1997) and No. 211 (1999). Without the identification of activities that could be terminated, the Organisation's other important activities would inevitably be penalised in the medium term.

4. The Assembly expresses its strong disapproval of the decision by the Committee of Ministers to postpone the provision of the financial resources which are indispensable for the implementation of the activities and programmes to be conducted within the framework of the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe, despite the fact that all member states have recognised that lasting peace and political stability can be achieved only through democracy and respect for human rights, the rule of law and political pluralism.

5. The Assembly wishes to voice its dissatisfaction with the existing budgetary procedure, involving as it does many cumbersome and time-consuming meetings which very often yield meagre results. Given the undeniable shortcomings of this procedure, it would seem wise to consider a two-year budgeting procedure which would permit efficient and timely planning of activities, thus fostering a more rational use of resources on the basis of established priorities. Adopting a new, streamlined budgetary method would also enable the Organisation to devise and implement its programmes more effectively and to concentrate more fully on its overall political strategy, as pointed out in Assembly Opinions Nos. 199 (1996), 203 (1997) and 211 (1999).

6. The Assembly wishes to draw the Committee of Ministers' attention to the importance it attaches to staff policy (flexible job management, mobility, leaving allowances, early retirement and creation of structural posts). Given the increased tasks and challenges facing the Council of Europe with its wider membership, it is essential that the Organisation be able to rely on an independent, highly qualified and motivated Secretariat and that greater flexibility in the administration of the Council of Europe be introduced. It therefore invites the

1. (see Doc. 8672, report of the Committee on the Budget, rapporteur: Mr Schreiner). Textadopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 17 May2000

Committee of Ministers to develop appropriate suggestions in this regard. The Assembly also notes that the Organisation's expenditure on training is at present inadequate compared with other international organisations.

7. Within the framework of the Optimum Plan, the Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to consider the possibility of decentralising human resources management in order to foster a systematic and efficient redeployment and reorganisation of human and material resources.

8. The Assembly wishes to underscore the importance of establishing a privately managed, financially viable and self-sufficient pension fund, as requested in its Recommendation 1391 (1998) and Opinion No. 211 (1999), so as to guarantee the payment of staff members' pensions.

9. The Assembly is greatly concerned at what it perceives as a certain lack of solidarity among member states with regard to the scale of their contributions to the ordinary budget. Committee of Ministers Resolution (94) 31, by which the rate of contributions of the five major contributors was reduced to only 12.75% of the ordinary budget, has merely aggravated the position of less wealthy member states and bogged down the Committee of Ministers in time-consuming and fruitless deliberations.

With regard to the 2001 budget

10. The Assembly reiterates its view that the Council of Europe must be given financial resources commensurate with its pan-European mission. One way of achieving this would be to enter a special "Council of Europe" heading in national budgets; another would be 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 proposed in the Assembly Opinions No. 199 (1996) and No. 211 (1999).

11. The Assembly, considering that any further enlargement of the Council of Europe requires supplementary financial resources to cover the cost of new member states, requests the Committee of Ministers to pledge the provision of additional funds should new countries be invited to join.

12. The Assembly requests the Committee of Ministers to identify appropriate financial resources when taking up its own political initiatives.

13. The Assembly calls on the Organisation's member governments to ensure that future unspent budgetary appropriations in the ordinary budget, as well as any savings identified by the Secretariat in the course of a given year, are automatically put into an "intervention fund" which could be subsequently used to finance specific activities.

14. The Assembly, considering that the limited human and financial resources allocated to the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights via internal redeployment are inadequate for fulfilling the Office's challenging tasks, urges the Committee of Ministers to increase the commissioner's budgetary funds.

15. In the context of the imminent restructuring of the Council of Europe Secretariat and the perpetuation of the zero real growth approach, it would appear advisable to introduce a scheme, based on Resolution (92)28 on the regulation introducing special measures to terminate the service of permanent staff of the Council of Europe. The Assembly believes that such a scheme would have the advantage of speeding up the renewal of the Organisation's human resources, promoting career advancement on the basis of merit, seniority and equal opportunities, and introducing new nationalities into the Secretariat.

16. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers carefully examine the Council of Europe accommodation situation, as some departments already lack sufficient office space in relation to their needs. This problem will become even more acute with the expansion of the European Court of Human Rights, which might make it necessary to re-house a number of departments.

17. The Assembly welcomes the introduction of a revised budget structure and reporting system based on priorities, which will give the Secretariat greater discretion and responsibility in the management of programmes and budgetary resources. In view of the close link between objectives and resources, the Assembly feels that updated and more flexible financial and staff regulations should be envisaged in order to adapt procedures and working methods to this new management culture in the Organisation, particularly as regards the Assembly's specific character and needs.

18. The Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to pay closer attention to the functioning of the treaty monitoring arrangements, particularly in the case of the European Social Charter, where a considerable increase in the work of the Secretariat, compounded by a lack of new staff, has placed a growing strain on the existing human resources.

19. The Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to review its current method of financing salary adjustments and to make separate provision for this item in the Organisation's future ordinary budgets.