Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Opinion 219 (2000)[1]

Expenditure of the Assembly for the 2001 financial year

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Considering that the principle of zero real growth has been a feature of the Council of Europe's budget in the last three years, the Assembly hopes that the human and material resources planned for the year 2001 will be sufficient to complete the Organisation's enlargement process, to carry out its expanded monitoring procedures and to pursue its important political efforts aimed at consolidating democratic and political institutions, respect for human rights and the rule of law in all member states without imposing excessive financial constraints.

2. While the Assembly welcomes the additional sum of some 167 700 euros granted by the Committee of Ministers for undertaking monitoring procedures in a larger number of member states, it deeply regrets that the Committee of Ministers met only one of its budgetary requests for the year 2000 which amounted to 820 000 euros, as set out in its Opinion No. 212 (1999). The Committee of Ministers decided in particular not to adopt any of the Assembly's staffing proposals. The continuation of such a policy would undermine good industrial relations, demotivate very deserving staff members and lead to serious problems in the running of the Assembly in the medium term.

3. The Assembly is fully aware of the budgetary difficulties of several member states. Taking account of the principle of zero real budgetary growth, the Assembly has therefore decided to put forward only some very modest budgetary proposals, which are essential for maintaining its overall ability to function efficiently. The Assembly hopes that these financial constraints will not jeopardise the smooth functioning of the Organisation's parliamentary organ, in particular when it comes to fostering parliamentary democracy, political pluralism and respect for human rights in certain member states. If the budgetary resources already allocated to the Assembly prove insufficient, the Assembly would be obliged to abandon some important political initiatives in order to cover the cost of its priorities. To obviate such a risk, the Assembly may well ask the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to present additional budgetary proposals to the Committee of Ministers in the course of 2001. This request would be in line with Article 38. d of the Council of Europe Statute.

4. Over the years, the Assembly, being a strong advocate of reform, has continued to rationalise the use of its limited, over-stretched resources, as witnessed by the last Assembly Bureau efforts to propose a more focused, manageable and flexible Assembly structure. Hence, the Assembly's proposals for the year 2001 form part of a longer-term strategy designed to rationalise its structure.

5. The enlargement process has also had important consequences for the Assembly's political groups. Their secretariat resources need to be enhanced in view of the growth in their memberships as well as their expanded role within the Assembly. A gradual increase in their financial resources is therefore necessary.

6. The 2001 Assembly budgetary requests as a whole represent an increase of some 85 600 euros (0.6%) in real terms over the appropriations allocated to the Assembly for 2000. The Assembly feels that such an increase, proposed in a spirit of realism, is well within the capacity of the Organisation's budgetary authorities.

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1. (see Doc. 8673, report of the Committee on the Budget, rapporteur: Mr Schreiner). Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf ofthe Assembly, on 17 May 2000

Appendix

Appended to this opinion are:

1. a table of requested increases for 2001 compared with the appropriations for 2000;
2. brief explanations for the changes.

VOTE III of the Ordinary Budget – Expenditure of the Assembly	**Appropriations for 2000**	**Changes in real terms proposed for 2001**
	Euros	**Euros**
HEAD 3.1 – Staff		
Sub-heads/articles		
3101 – Salary, allowances and social charges of the Secretary General of the Assembly	164 300	
3102 – Remuneration of staff recruited on established posts	6 180 300	14 100
3103 – Recruitment, arrival and departure expenses – Home leave	61 000	
3104 – Overtime – statutory and other allowances	21 300	
3105 – Remuneration and accessory charges of temporary staff	1 480 000	18 000
3106 – Provision for adjustments to remuneration	p.m.	
3107 – Secondment of national civil servants to the Assembly	61 000	
TOTAL HEAD 3.1	7 967 900	32 100
HEAD 3.2 – Allocation to the Assembly's political groups		
3201 – Allocation to the Assembly's political groups	614 400	53 500
TOTAL HEAD 3.2	614 400	53 500
HEAD 3.3 – Supplies, services and other operational expenditure		
3301 – Publishing and printing	971 600	
3302 – Interpretation	1 764 300	
3303 – Translation	983 000	
3304 – Official expenses of the President of the Assembly	81 600	
3305 – Expenditure pertaining to the Private Office of the President of the Assembly	76 200	
3306 – Representational expenditure, other official expenditure and travelling expenses of members of the Assembly	198 200	
3307 – Official journeys	259 200	
3308 – Expenses for inviting guests of the Parliamentary Assembly	183 500	
3309 – Consultation of experts	76 200	
3310 – Organisation of ad hoc conferences	137 200	
3311 – Grant to the International Institute for Democracy	38 100	
3312 – Other expenditure not specifically provided for in this vote	50 300	
3313 – Modernisation of the Assembly's equipment	p.m.	

VOTE III of the Ordinary Budget – Expenditure of the Assembly	Appropriations for 2000	Changes in real terms proposed for 2001
	Euros	Euros
3314 – European prizes	61 000	
3315 – Operating and maintenance costs of the electronic voting system	35 100	
3316 – Co-operation and monitoring programme	762 200	
TOTAL HEAD 3.3	5 677 700	
TOTAL VOTE III	14 260 000	85 600

Vote III – Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly

Head 3.1 – Staff

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

The 2001 appropriations under this sub-head should be maintained at the same level in real terms as in 2000.

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 secretariat of the Assembly, which comprises the following seventy-five 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 Assembly, fully aware of the budgetary situation of some member states, believes that the more comprehensive reform of its secretariat structure, as proposed in its Opinions Nos. 206 (1998) and 212 (1999), should be further postponed in the hope that European economic growth will soon accelerate in the course of 2001 and that the modification of Assembly structures will be finalised and put into effect. It is in this spirit that the Assembly formulates its exceptionally modest requests, which include some upgradings of existing posts and no creation of new ones.

The proposed limited staffing changes for 2001, which concern only B-grade staff, are in line with 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 secretariat of the Assembly.

At 2000 rates, the cost of these proposed modifications is 14 100 euros.

one upgrading from B5 to B6 (2 900 euros)

three upgradings from B3 to B4 (7 200 euros)

two upgradings from B2 to B3 (4 000 euros)

One upgrading from B5 to B6 (2 900 euros)

The request for the upgrading of a B5 post to B6 appeared earlier in Assembly Opinions No. 201 (1997), No. 206 (1998) and No. 212 (1999).

The responsibilities and workload of the person in charge of the administrative and secretarial unit of the Table Office have increased considerably in recent years. This staff member supervises a team of secretaries and is responsible for the registration, preparation and publication of all Assembly documents as well as specific publications needed for plenary sessions (presence lists, voting lists, seating plan, etc.). She is also responsible for the preparation and publication of adopted texts as well as the publication of minutes of proceedings, official report of debates, etc. Her concerns further include the list of parliamentarians, committee memberships, the register of references to committees, the preparation of indexes for publication and the supervision of the mailing lists. By way of example, the number of documents in the last four years rose by at least 40%.

To emphasise even further the validity of this upgrading request, the rapporteur wishes to describe the increasingly difficult working conditions of the Table Office during the Assembly's four part-sessions. On average, the working hours of the Table Office team are from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Considering the length of a non-stop fourteen-hour shift and the continuous and high level of concentration necessary to accomplish a large number of tasks – including the registration, preparation and publication of all Assembly documents as well as specific publications needed for plenary sessions – the rapporteur feels that a second team composed of temporary staff has become crucial to ensure the efficient and smooth running of this vital service (see sub-head 3105).

Three upgradings from B3 to B4 (7 200 euros)

Two upgradings from B2 to B3 (4 000 euros)

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. Indeed, with the introduction of new technologies in work processes and the decentralisation policy involving many departments within the Organisation, it is very often forgotten that assistants are being expected to take on more responsibilities and acquire new professional skills. This consideration also holds for those B-grade staff whose work is not directly related to committees, such as archivists and Table Office assistants, where scope for promotion does not exist at present.

In addition to their normal secretarial duties, B-grade staff working in the secretariat of the Assembly:

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 (that is, 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 induction 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 B-grade staff members as regards their grades and duties. It is therefore urgent to start to upgrade two B2 posts to B3 and at least three B3 posts to B4 for those B-grade staff who have fully deserved this recognition through their hard work and genuine commitment.

The Bureau of the Assembly is currently considering the proposal for a more focused and flexible Assembly structure which would offer an opportunity to introduce a credible, far-sighted policy of career advancement for B-grade staff. For so many years, there has been a very myopic attitude towards the important work carried out by this category of staff. Statistically speaking, B-grade staff have to wait on average twelve years for promotion in the secretariat of the Assembly, while for A-grades the period is around five years. There are some flagrant examples indicating that a large number of skilled and devoted B-grade staff have remained in the same grade for over twenty years. Furthermore, at least 50% of the B-grade staff are blocked in the same grade for over ten years and in the case of grade B3 staff for more than twenty years.

Given this unsatisfactory situation and the unique opportunity afforded by the reorganisation of the Assembly structure, the rapporteur recommends that an innovative, long-term, career-oriented structure, which can be easily spread over a period of three years, be introduced in the secretariat of the Assembly. This would

consist in offering promotion at regular intervals for those B-grade staff who, over the years, have demonstrated their professional skills through commitment and hard work. Such a proposal builds on the thorough, albeit progressive, reorganisation of the committee structure, as suggested by the Assembly in its Opinions No. 206 (1998) and No. 212 (1999) – a reform which has become absolutely necessary in order to cope with the increasingly demanding tasks entrusted to the Assembly's secretariat, 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 2001 appropriations under sub-heads 3103 and 3104 should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 2000.

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

The rapporteur has already described the working conditions of the Table Office during the Assembly's four part-sessions. Nevertheless, he wishes to emphasise that an additional temporary team has become vital to ensure the efficient and smooth running of this very important service.

The continuous flow of enquiries from Assembly members to the Table Office further exacerbates the already stressful working climate. Moreover, with the introduction of the electronic voting system, one staff member has to ensure a non-stop presence outside the Chamber in order to guarantee the validation of Assembly members' (Representatives or Substitutes) voting cards. This will place an additional strain on the limited and over-stretched human resources. In these nerve-wracking conditions, it is hard to imagine how a staff member can learn to carry out another person's job. An additional problem resulting from the existence of only one Table Office team is that if one staff member fell ill during the session it would be absolutely impossible to replace him or her.

Given the technical knowledge necessary to perform the administrative and secretarial work involved and the limited number of staff working for the Assembly, there has been no scope for rotating staff members engaged in Table Office activities, particularly at B-grade level. Since some B-grade staff members forming part of the Table Office team are due to retire in the coming two or three years, it is only sensible to arrange for them to have new staff working with them so that they can pass on to them the unique experience they have acquired after so many years. It is against this background that the rapporteur recommends that an additional team composed of temporary staff be created (four B-grade temporary staff recruited for a period of seven days four times a year). The total cost of this proposed additional recruitment would be 18 000 euros.

Sub-head 3106 – Provision for adjustments to remuneration – p.m.

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

The 2001 appropriation under sub-head 3107 should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 2000.

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. Therefore it is imperative to increase the financial resources of the five political groups.

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, 1999 and 2000 amounted to 614 400 euros. Each group received a fixed allowance of some 27 440 euros and an additional per capita allowance (some 820 euros per member).

In its Opinions No. 206 (1998) and No. 212 (1999), the Assembly asked for a modest increase of some 10 700 euros per group (53 500 euros in all) to cover the cost of one half-time administrative officer. However, this request was not granted. For 2001, an increase of 10 700 euros in the fixed allowance of each group is

once again requested. The total increase requested is, therefore, 53 500 euros (5 x 10 700 euros), with the intention that this lump-sum allocation for secretarial services should 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 this head 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.

Head 3.3. includes all operational expenditure of the Assembly, that is, co-operation and monitoring programmes, publications, interpretations, translations, official journeys, experts, conferences, European prizes, etc. In a context of zero real budgetary growth, the Assembly has decided to maintain the expenditure within this head in 2001 at the same level as in 2000. It is worth noting, however, that this prolonged budgetary position may force the Assembly to abandon some important political initiatives, thereby imperilling its overall functioning. To preserve such activities, the Assembly should ask the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to present additional budgetary proposals to the Committee of Ministers in the course of 2001. This request would be in line with Article 38.d of the Council of Europe Statute.

The 2001 appropriation under head 3.3 should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 2000.