Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Opinion 224 (2001)[1]

Budget of the Council of Europe for the financial year 2002

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly restates its view that the Council of Europe, a pan-European institution, must be given financial and human resources commensurate with the mission and tasks entrusted to it. It deeply regrets that in the last four years no additional funds have been made available to the Organisation. Should this still be the case for 2002, the overall functioning of the Organisation will be seriously jeopardised, especially at a time when it is striving to assist new member states in their transition towards better and more stable institutions.

1. In the present political context, where insecurity remains and where democracy has not yet been fully established in some member states, depriving the Organisation of the necessary financial resources would hamper its ability to contribute to European affairs, undermine its credibility within member states and jeopardise its important objectives aimed at preserving peace, consolidating democratic institutions, fostering political pluralism, promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law, providing legal assistance and combating crime, corruption and social exclusion.

2. To improve the Organisation's budgetary situation in the future, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers carefully examine the following measures:

2.1. co-ordinating the Organisation's budgetary timetable with the national budgetary timetable of member states. This would enable governments to examine the Council of Europe's budgetary needs in detail before taking any final decision on their forthcoming national budgets;

2.2. given the major shortcomings and cumbersome nature of the current budgetary procedure, introducing a two-year system such as exists in other international organisations, as pointed out in Assembly Opinions Nos. 199 (1996), 203 (1997), 211 (1999) and 218 (2000). This would enable the Organisation to plan and implement multi-annual projects, in particular as regards the consolidation of democratic institutions in central and eastern Europe, the protection of minorities and the fight against social exclusion;

2.3. creating a special "Council of Europe" heading within national budgets and allowing the ministries concerned, such as those engaged in cultural, educational, legal and social activities, to contribute to the financing of certain intergovernmental activities, as already requested in Assembly Opinions Nos. 199 (1996), 211 (1999) and 218 (2000). Contributions to the Council of Europe are financed through provisions in the budgets of foreign affairs ministries labelled "contributions to international organisations". Indeed, in most Council of Europe member states the lowest rate of budget growth in recent years has been precisely in the foreign affairs ministries, which explains why the Council of Europe's rightful claims for budgetary increases, although legitimate, have been frustrated over the last four years;

2.4. reviewing the criteria contained in Resolution 94 (31) whereby the contributions of the five major contributors were reduced to represent only 12.7% of the ordinary budget, thereby aggravating the position of less wealthy member states. The Assembly continues to be greatly concerned by what it perceives to be a certain lack of solidarity among member states. One option would be to use only

1. Assembly debate on 23 April 2001 (9th Sitting) (see Doc. 9013, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr von der Esch). Text adopted by the Assembly on 23 April 2001 (9th Sitting).

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita as a basis for calculating the contribution scales. An alternative proposal would be to amend Resolution 94 (31) by including a provision setting a minimum contribution to be paid by each member state;

2.5. exploring additional methods of financing other than the traditional one of seeking increased contributions from member states;

2.6. believing that the current, consensus-based, decision-making process of the Committee of Ministers has the effect of frustrating any effort to increase the Organisation's human and financial resources, the Assembly encourages the Committee of Ministers to modify its modus operandi, in particular when it comes to taking decisions on the Council of Europe's budget.

3. Believing that its contribution in respect of the budgetary and administrative affairs of the Organisation has greatly helped the Committee of Ministers to identify new priority areas, the Assembly proposes that, in keeping with Recommendation 1344 (1997), joint decision-making powers be granted to it in setting the Organisation's overall budget.

4. As already proposed in Opinions Nos. 203 (1997), 211 (1999) and 218 (2000), the Assembly considers it essential to make specific budgetary provision for the European Court of Human Rights as the European body entrusted with the protection of human rights on our continent. Given the importance and the scope of the Court's activities and its ever growing structural needs, increased obligatory contributions are required to ensure the smooth functioning of such an important organ, even though voluntary contributions are welcome. Expenditure under Vote IV covering the operation of the European Court of Human Rights could be the subject of a specific contribution coming from the justice ministries in the member states.

5. The Assembly urges the Committee of Ministers to earmark adequate financial resources whenever it takes political decisions resulting in additional tasks to be undertaken by the Organisation.While welcoming the introduction of a budget line labelled "intervention fund", the Assembly considers that the method of financing via voluntary contributions is insufficient to ensure the financial coverage of unforeseen, albeit necessary, expenditure.

6. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers carefully consider all the financial implications of the accession of new member states. It therefore strongly deplores the Committee of Ministers' refusal to raise the 2001 budget ceiling so as to give the Council of Europe the financial resources needed to implement initial assistance programmes for its most recent members, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

7. While welcoming the funds initially made available for the Council of Europe's contribution to the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, the Assembly expects the 2001 Regional Funding Conference to provide urgently the Organisation with the financial resources necessary for its continued involvement in the Stability Pact.

8. The Assembly asks the Committee of Ministers to pay closer attention to the rising costs associated with treaty monitoring arrangements, in particular where new accessions place additional strain on human and financial resources.

9. In view of the Council of Europe's observer status with the United Nations General Assembly and its fruitful and long-standing co-operation with the United Nations bodies and specialised agencies, the Committee of Ministers should consider how a permanent presence for the Organisation in New York could be established in the future.

10. The Assembly believes that – as part of the ongoing restructuring of the Council of Europe aimed at prioritisation of activities and rationalisation of working methods – the Committee of Ministers should increase the resources needed to enhance the Organisation's communications impact, through technological developments, an updated and efficient network of media contacts and a multilingual publications strategy.

11. The Assembly, being opposed to the perpetuation of zero-budgetary growth in real terms, which hinders the implementation of a new human resources policy, asks the Committee of Ministers to take special measures, based on Resolution (92) 28, in respect of an early retirement scheme, in order to speed up the renewal of the Organisation's human resources and to foster the systematic and efficient redeployment of staff.

12. The Assembly underlines the importance of establishing a complementary pension fund, as requested in its Recommendation 1391 (1998) and Opinions Nos. 211 (1999) and 218 (2000), which would help member states to meet their statutory obligation to pay the pensions of retired staff members.

13. It recommends that the Committee of Ministers carefully examine the Council of Europe's precarious office space situation, especially in view of the ongoing expansion of the activities of the European Court of Human Rights, as outlined in Assembly Opinion No. 218 (2000).

14. The Assembly encourages the Committee of Ministers to monitor the evolution of member states' voluntary contributions and consider their effect on the long-term work of the Organisation.

15. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers observe the principles of equal opportunities and fair geographical distribution in its recruitment policy and ensure that the Organisation can rely at all times on a competent and independent staff.