Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Opinion 236 (2002)[1]

Budgets of the Council of Europe for the financial year 2003

Parliamentary Assembly

1. After four years of budgetary austerity, the Parliamentary Assembly welcomes the additional resources made available to the Organisation in 2002. These new funds, representing a positive outcome of the Committee of Ministers' budgetary discussions, will assist the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in pursuing his continuing, courageous efforts to streamline internal working methods, make better use of existing resources and provide additional funds for the four main priorities identified by the Committee of Ministers in the aftermath of the Committee of Wise Persons' report.

2. Given the Council of Europe's specific role in the new institutional architecture of Europe, it is crucial that member states' governments continue to give it the human and financial resources needed to finance a wide array of activities aimed at combating the growth of terrorism, organised crime, corruption and illicit trafficking, which are generating an unhealthy climate of insecurity in several member states. Furthermore, additional resources are necessary to fund other important activities, 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 corruption and social exclusion.

3. The Assembly deplores the fact that the Committee of Ministers has not agreed to the measures proposed by the Assembly, in Opinion No. 224 (2001), to improve the Organisation's precarious budgetary situation. These measures are:

co-ordinating the Organisation's budgetary timetable with the national budgetary timetables of member states. In this regard, the Assembly believes that a study on prevailing budgetary procedures in the member states should be undertaken in the future. Such a change would enable governments to examine the Council of Europe's budgetary needs in detail before taking any final decision on their forthcoming national budgets;

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), 218 (2000) and 224 (2001). 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;

creating a special "Council of Europe" line within national budgets and allowing the ministries concerned, such as those responsible for cultural, educational, legal and social matters, to contribute to the financing of certain intergovernmental activities, as already requested in Assembly Opinions Nos. 199, 211, 218 and 224. Contributions to the Council of Europe come from allocations in the budgets of foreign affairs ministries labelled "contributions to international organisations". The fact is that 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 justified requests for budgetary increases have been frustrated over the last four years;

1. Assembly debate on 22 April 2002 (9th Sitting) (see Doc. 9386, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Schreiner). Text adopted by the Assembly on 22 April 2002 (9th Sitting).

reviewing the criteria set out in Resolution (94) 31 whereby the contributions of the five major contributors were reduced to only 12.6% of the ordinary budget, thereby aggravating the position of less wealthy member states. The Assembly continues to be greatly concerned at what it perceives as a certain lack of solidarity among member states. One option would be to use only 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 clause setting a minimum contribution to be paid by each member state. In this context, the Assembly wishes to underline that any possible change in the criteria set out in this resolution should not be used to reduce the Organisation's overall budget;

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

4. 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.

5. Believing that its contributions in respect of the budgetary and administrative affairs of the Organisation have significantly helped the Committee of Ministers to identify new priority areas, the Assembly suggests that, in keeping with Recommendation 1344 (1997), joint decision-making powers be granted to the Assembly in setting the Organisation's overall budget.

6. Having examined the Evaluation Group's report to the Committee of Ministers on the European Court of Human Rights, the Assembly welcomes the additional financial resources given to the European Court of Human Rights in 2002. However, as already proposed in Assembly Opinions Nos. 203, 211, 218 and 224, the Assembly considers it essential to make specific budgetary provision for the European Court of Human Rights within the Organisation's Ordinary Budget as the European body entrusted with the protection of human rights on our continent. Given the importance and scope of the Court's activities and its ever-growing structural needs, increased obligatory contributions are required to ensure the smooth functioning of this important organ, even though voluntary contributions are welcomed. Expenditure under Vote IV covering the operation of the European Court of Human Rights could be the subject of a specific contribution from the justice ministries in member states.

7. 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. It welcomes the introduction in the 2002 Ordinary Budget of a field mission reserve, amounting to €1.5 million, which will enable the Council of Europe to react swiftly to unforeseen political developments. It encourages the Committee of Ministers to continue to make provision for this field mission reserve, as the method of financing via voluntary contributions is inadequate to ensure the financial coverage of unforeseen, albeit necessary, expenditure. As a general rule, voluntary contributions are always generous at the start of a given project, but tend to dwindle in subsequent years. It therefore encourages the Committee of Ministers to monitor the trend of member states' voluntary contributions and consider their effect on the long-term work of the Organisation.

8. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers carefully consider all the financial implications of new accessions. It therefore 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. The Assembly welcomes the Committee of Ministers' decision to start preparatory work on the construction of two new buildings to meet the accommodation needs of the Council of Europe Secretariat and the European Pharmacopoeia.

10. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers carefully consider all the financial implications of the Organisation's information offices, which form part of a strategy designed not only to better monitor the implementation and impact of Council of Europe activities and programmes in the host countries, but also to develop further the Organisation's co-operation with the countries concerned and with other international institutions active in similar fields.

11. 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 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.

12. 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.

13. The Assembly urges the Committee of Ministers to establish, without further delay, regulations governing a complementary pension fund, as requested in its Recommendation 1391 (1998) and Opinions Nos. 211, 218 and 224, which would help member states meet their statutory obligation to pay the pensions of retired staff members.

14. Given the imminent introduction of a new staff policy, rightly initiated by the Secretary General, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers pay special attention to the principles of equal opportunity and fair geographical distribution in its future recruitment policy. The Assembly also 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.

15. In view of the ongoing negotiations on future salary adjustments for all five co-ordinated organisations – the Council of Europe, the European Centre for Medium-range Weather Forecasts, the European Space Agency, Nato and the OECD – the Assembly restates its view, already set out in Recommendation 1488 (2000), that an objective and mathematical method must be established in order to enable the secretaries general of these five international institutions to recruit, retain and motivate highly trained, competent and independent staff. It is therefore crucial that staff remuneration remains competitive with regard to three recruitment markets, namely the private sector, national civil services and international civil servants, including the European Union.