



Opinion 237 (2002)¹

Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly for the financial year 2003

Parliamentary Assembly

1. One year after the implementation of its reform, which has resulted in a more focused, manageable and flexible structure, the Parliamentary Assembly finds that its present financial and human resources are not commensurate with the tasks and responsibilities entrusted to it. Moreover, its capacity to function efficiently and to act swiftly to meet its evolving priorities has been reduced by the persistent financial constraints imposed by the Committee of Ministers.
2. The Assembly hopes that the Committee of Ministers will agree to its budgetary proposals for the year 2003, representing an increase of €297 300 (some 2%) in real terms over its 2002 appropriations. These resources are necessary not only to ensure its smooth functioning in the medium term but also to complete the Organisation's enlargement process, which increasingly concerns countries in particular need of assistance, to carry out its expanded monitoring procedures and to pursue its political initiatives aimed at consolidating democratic and political institutions, preserving peace, fostering political pluralism, promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law, providing legal assistance and combating terrorism, crime, corruption and social exclusion.
3. The Assembly regrets that in the last two years the Committee of Ministers has not agreed to its modest budgetary requests and in particular its limited staffing proposals. The Assembly stresses that, since its budgetary estimates are particularly reasonable in comparison with the Council of Europe's general budget, it should not have to suffer excessive and prolonged financial constraints jeopardising its functioning as well as its activities.
4. It points out that, given the Assembly's responsibility to complete the enlargement process in the coming years, additional human and financial resources are required to enable it to cope with its tasks, and the Committee of Ministers should increasingly concentrate on ensuring that the Organisation as a whole has the financial means to continue to perform its role as guarantor of democratic security and stability on the continent, a mission which fully justifies a weightier financial commitment from its member states. Given the Organisation's ongoing budgetary constraints, the Assembly has decided to limit its staffing requests, for the year 2003, to two main priorities: the creation of an A4-grade post to reinforce the secretariat of the Table Office and one upgrading from A4 to A5.
5. The Assembly encourages the Committee of Ministers to consider ways and means of providing assistance, where necessary, to the most disadvantaged countries whose own financial resources alone do not enable them to play an active part in the work of the Organisation. It therefore does not believe that the Committee of Ministers should use new accessions in order to reduce further the contributions of states which are already members.
6. Fully sharing the Committee of Ministers' renewed emphasis on the need for a higher profile in the Organisation's work, the Assembly wishes to develop further its interparliamentary co-operation and other external relations, as well as its communication policy, by making the fullest use of new possibilities opened

1. Assembly debate on 22 April 2002 (9th Sitting) (see [Doc. 9387](#), report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Schreiner). Text adopted by the Assembly on 22 April 2002 (9th Sitting).



up in the media field through technological developments. This would make the Assembly's activities, public documents and information material more accessible to the general public, governments, parliaments and other institutions.

7. The Assembly regards research as an essential element of innovation and asks the Committee of Ministers to cover the modest cost of a research programme focusing on issues of relevance to its institutional mission. This would afford prominent academics and recognised international experts the opportunity to gain exposure to the Assembly's policy-making environment.

8. The enlargement process has also greatly affected the functioning of the Assembly's five political groups. In view of the growth in membership of each political group as a result of enlargement, and considering also their increased role in the Assembly's life, their secretarial and financial resources, which have not been raised since 1997, should now be increased in a way which serves to remedy the financial difficulties encountered.

Appended to this opinion are:

a table of requested increases for 2003 compared with the appropriations for 2002;
brief explanations for the proposed changes.

Appendix

VOTE III of the ordinary budget – Expenditure of the Assembly		Appropriations for 2002 EUROS	Changes in real terms proposed for 2003 EUROS
HEAD 0301 – Staff			
Sub-heads			
0000001 - Remuneration of staff recruited on established posts	6 526 200		133 800
0000003 - Remuneration and accessory charges of temporary staff	1 571 700		40 000
0000005 - Salary, allowances and social charges of the Secretary General of the Assembly	175 500		
0000007 - Overtime – statutory and other allowances	21 300		
0000013 - Secondment of national civil servants to the Assembly	61 000		
0000016 - Recruitment, arrival and departure expenses – Home leave	61 000		
TOTAL HEAD 0301	8 416 700		173 800
HEAD 0302 – Allocation to the Assembly's political groups			
0000370 - Allocation to the Assembly's political groups	614 400		53 500
TOTAL HEAD 0302	614 400		53 500
HEAD 0303 – Supplies, services and other operational expenditure			
Sub-heads			
0000080 - Official journeys	340 700		
0000095 - Representational expenditure, other official expenditure and travelling expenses of members of the Assembly	189 300		
0000115 - Interpretation	1 887 000		
0000116 - Translation	1 070 400		
0000125 - Publishing and printing	775 300		
0000129 - Consultation of experts	70 000		20 000
0000162 - Expenditure pertaining to the Private Office of the President of the Assembly	80 800		
0000163 - Official expenses of the President of the Assembly	97 000		
0000166 - Expenses for inviting guests of the Parliamentary Assembly	148 500		
0000171 - Organisation of ad hoc conferences	130 000		
0000203 - Grant to the International Institute for Democracy	30 500		
0000204 - Modernisation of the Assembly's equipment	p.m.		
0000205 - European prizes	75 000		
0000206 - Operating and maintenance costs of the electronic voting system	38 400		
0000250 - Co-operation and monitoring programme	762 200		
0000392 - Other expenditure not specifically provided for in this vote	55 000		50 000
TOTAL HEAD 0303	5 750 100		70 000

VOTE III of the ordinary budget – Expenditure of the Assembly	Appropriations for 2002 EUROS	Changes in real terms proposed for 2003 EUROS
TOTAL VOTE III	14 781 200	297 300

Vote III – Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly

Head 0301 – Staff

Sub-head 0000001 – 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 76 posts.

At present, the Assembly structure consists of ten committees: seven comprised of 79 members (with 79 alternates), one of 76 members (with 76 alternates) and two of 48 members (with 48 alternates). The permanent staff of the Assembly secretariat contains 76 posts:

1 A7 - 2 B6

2 A6 - 5 B5

8 A5 - 13 B4

13 A4 - 12 B3

17 A2/A3 - 2 B2

1 C4

To be fully operational, each of the seven committees with 79 members, as well as that of 76, requires four A-grade staff (one head of secretariat at A5 level, a secretary at A4 level and two co-secretaries at A2/A3 level), one B4 administrative assistant and one B2/B3 official. The other two committees of 48 members each need two A-grade staff (one secretary at A4 level and one co-secretary at A2/A3 level), one B4 administrative assistant and one B2/B3 official.

The current establishment table, however, does not permit the Secretary General of the Assembly to redeploy the Assembly's permanent staff members so as to achieve the desired structure. In fact, one year after the implementation of the reform, several committees have faced difficulties in coping with the increased tasks and responsibilities resulting from their enlarged membership. In the medium term, the present structure of committee secretariats is at risk of proving inadequate to maintain the quality of work and the ability, essential in a political body, to respond to unforeseen events in an efficient and rapid manner.

At present, the Assembly's secretariat is organised so that 42 staff serve the Assembly's ten committees, with the remaining 34 working for the Bureau of the Assembly, the Private Office of the President of the Assembly, the Table Office and the Interparliamentary Relations department, and the Administration, Communication, Information Technology and Research Units. With the introduction of the new staff policy, eight temporary staff are likely to be integrated in the Assembly's committees in 2002, thereby reinforcing its permanent structure. According to the above-mentioned structure, however, the Assembly's ten committees should be served by 56 staff. Even with integration of the eight currently temporary staff to be made permanent, therefore, the Assembly's secretariat would remain understaffed. Remedy of this shortfall is an essential precondition to adopting the structure deemed necessary for discharging the Assembly's tasks and responsibilities.

A further aspect concerns career prospects, which are indeed vital not only to ensure that the Assembly's staff remain motivated to do a good job for their committees and the Assembly as a whole, but also to recruit young and qualified new staff. In this respect, the Assembly recommends that the posts, which have been directly affected by the Assembly restructuring, be upgraded in view of the fact that the responsibilities and tasks of a number of A- and B-grade staff members have been increased as a result of the wider terms of reference of the new Assembly committees they serve.

Special attention should be paid to the Table Office. After careful examination, the Assembly feels that this important office is not adequately served by only one permanent A-grade staff member who, in the course of the four part-sessions, is the sole person responsible for ensuring its smooth functioning and the quality of its

work. On the one hand, this staff member has to be present in the Hemicycle to assist the President and the Secretary General of the Assembly and to register the adoption of texts. On the other, he has to be in his office ensuring that tabled amendments comply with the Assembly's Rules of Procedure, organising the speakers' list, dealing with members' queries and/or complaints, supervising the work of the teams of temporary staff who prepare the President's files and minutes, as well as attending various meetings, in particular with national delegation secretaries and those of the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities. As a result, the Table Office is too often left without the supervision of an A-grade staff member, who is not able to cope with its multiple tasks and responsibilities. This has inevitably led to errors and delays in the work of this office, which is hard-pressed and understaffed. Against this background, the Assembly believes that there is an urgent need to reinforce this important office, on which the success of the Assembly's part-sessions depends, by recruiting an A4-grade staff member (total cost €133 800) to assist the head of the Table Office in the performance of his complex and various duties.

Given the Organisation's ongoing budgetary constraints, the Assembly has decided to limit its staffing requests, for the year 2003, to two main priorities, namely:

- a. the creation of an A4-grade post to reinforce the secretariat of the Table Office;
- b. one upgrading from A4 to A5 to match the responsibilities and workload of the head of a 79-member committee with the administrative competence of an A5 grade. This request has already been put forward by the Assembly.

While the upgrading request could be financed within the Assembly's budget by internal transfer of appropriations, the creation of a new permanent post carries modest financial implications. The Assembly wishes to underline that the creation of new posts would afford the possibility of recruiting officials from the new member states, thereby ensuring a more equitable geographical representation of member states in the Assembly secretariat. The total cost of these proposed staffing changes for 2003 would be €133 800.

Sub-head 0000003 – Remuneration and accessory charges of temporary staff

In recent years, the workload of the English verbatim team has increased significantly. Statistics show that English is the predominant language in a wide range of debates, representing more than 75% of the Assembly's total proceedings. Along with the steady increase in the verbatim duties in spoken English there has come an increase in the number of English speeches to be recorded in full and printed. Furthermore, the number of undelivered speeches handed in for the record has risen, involving considerable editing. This has placed an additional strain on the verbatim editor and the latter's limited and over-stretched team. The recruitment of two additional staff members is therefore requested.

Similarly, the French summary team, working hand in hand with the English verbatim one, has to prepare an increasing number of summaries for speeches delivered in English and in other languages. Moreover, the French summary team provides journalists with a complete French summary of all speeches delivered. It would therefore be desirable to recruit two additional staff members for the French summary team.

The total cost of this proposed additional recruitment of temporary staff during sessions would be €40 000.

Sub-head 0000005 – Salary, allowances and social charges of the Secretary General of the Assembly

The 2003 appropriations under this sub-head should be maintained at the same level in real terms as in 2002.

Sub-head 0000007 – Overtime – Statutory and other allowances

The 2003 appropriations under this sub-head should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 2002.

Sub-head 0000013 – Secondment of national civil servants to the Assembly

The 2003 appropriation under this sub-head should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 2002.

Sub-head 0000016 – Recruitment, arrival and departure expenses – Home leave

The 2003 appropriations under this sub-head should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 2002.

Head 0302 – Allocation to the Assembly's political groups

Sub-head 0000370 – Allocation to the Assembly's political groups

The Assembly's political groups play an increasingly important role in the life of the Assembly. This has been crucial in enabling the Assembly to maintain its operational capacity and organisational efficiency following enlargement. However, if political groups are to be able to play their role to the full, they need to be adequately staffed in terms of both level and number. In the medium term, a gradual increase over several financial years should be aimed for, allowing each group to recruit one administrative officer and one secretarial assistant. It is therefore 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 membership. Appropriations for 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002 amounted to €614 400. Each group received a fixed allowance of some €27 440 and an additional per capita allowance (some €820 per member). It is important to underline that political groups spend, on average, some 60% of their total appropriations on secretaries whose salaries, for the period 1997-2002, have increased by 12.6% (corresponding to some €47 000). Since their allocated funds have been left unchanged for the last six years, this has greatly reduced the capacity of political groups to finance other important activities such as seminars, meetings and publications.

In its Opinions No. 206 (1998), No. 212 (1999), No. 219 (2000) and No. 225 (2001), the Assembly asked for a modest increase of around €10 700 per group (€53 500 in all) to cover the cost of one half-time administrative officer. However, this request was not granted. For 2003, an increase of €10 700 in the fixed allowance of each group is once again requested. The total increase requested is therefore €53 500 (5 x €10 700), the intention being to have this lump-sum allocation for secretarial services gradually built up over the coming years.

It should also be borne in mind that, along with increased Assembly membership (Georgia joined the Council of Europe on 25 April 1999, Armenia and Azerbaijan on 25 January 2001) there has been a parallel increase in the number of members not affiliated to any 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 were this to happen.

Head 0303 – Supplies, services and other operational expenditure

Since 1975 the appropriations under this head have been voted as a lump sum (budgetary package). The various sub-amounts may subsequently be altered in accordance with Article 31 of the Financial Regulations. Head 0303 includes all operational expenditure of the Assembly, namely co-operation and monitoring programmes, publications, interpretation, translation, official journeys, experts, conferences, European prizes, etc.

In the light of the Committee of Ministers' renewed emphasis on raising the profile of the Organisation, the Assembly has decided to ask for an additional €50 000 to enhance the Assembly's public image through the launching of new initiatives aimed at developing further its interparliamentary co-operation, external relations and communication. This set of activities will focus on three elements: firstly, to further deepen co-operation with national parliaments and other European and international institutions; secondly, to ensure more efficient follow-up to the Assembly's decisions, essential for increasing its credibility in member states; and, thirdly, to make the Assembly's work more visible and accessible to the public at large. These tasks include furthering contacts with the media as well as working in close co-operation with the Media and Press Division of the Communication and Research Directorate. The Assembly's magazine *The Europeans* will be distributed well beyond its current target – Parliamentary Assembly members – in order to enhance the visibility of the Assembly's work in national parliaments and other international organisations. The TV version of the *The Europeans*, a multi-media tool on the Assembly's website, will be made available to the websites of all national parliaments and partner organisations as well as to parliamentary TV channels. This would require additional investment in the purchasing of copyright-free picture material. A general information folder in the two official languages and, when necessary, in other languages, will help raise the Assembly's profile with the public at large. Media targeted activities will include intensified co-operation with major TV stations – along the lines of current agreements with Euronews and CNN – the development of co-operation with key radio stations and media coverage of the Assembly's activities on the ground. Other direct expenditure includes subscriptions to news and media monitoring agencies, invitations to journalists, press conferences and briefings, improvements to the Assembly's website and the updating of Assembly publications.

Over the years, the Parliamentary Assembly has consistently demonstrated its great ability as an international parliamentary body to adapt to the developments which have swept Europe, and to react swiftly to unforeseen political events. The recent structural reforms bear witness to the Assembly's willingness to change and to improve its working methods so as to make them better suited and more responsive to the evolving needs of its members. In this respect, the staff involved in the Assembly's Research Unit are unable to cope with the

growing level of demand from committees. Participation of individual members, whether representing the Assembly or one of its committees, in international and European conferences has indeed increased, particularly in recent years. These activities require the preparation of detailed files for Assembly members, along with the practical arrangements for such official journeys.

To alleviate this unsatisfactory situation without placing an excessive strain on the Organisation's limited budget, the Assembly believes it is important to set up an Assembly research programme. The objectives of such a programme are twofold: firstly, to offer research staff at the Parliamentary Assembly the chance of involvement and experience in current activities relating to the Assembly's fields of interest, by encouraging research visitors to interact with permanent staff; and secondly, to afford prominent academics and recognised international experts the opportunity to gain exposure to the Assembly's policy-making environment. Research visitors would conduct their research at the Assembly in Strasbourg and have access to the Council of Europe's library as well as computing and statistical facilities. Their work should focus on issues of relevance to the institutional mission of the Assembly, in particular the functioning of democratic institutions, respect for human rights, equal opportunities and social cohesion policies as well as cultural, economic, educational, environmental and migration matters. Candidates would be required to submit in English or French a curriculum vitae, along with a list of publications and a detailed research proposal specifying the objectives of the project and the approximate time needed for completion. Successful candidates would be offered a research contract for periods ranging from three to six months. The Assembly research programme's regulations and terms of contract would be established by the Secretary General of the Assembly and subsequently approved by the Bureau of the Assembly. For the year 2003, the appropriation for this innovative activity should be €20 000, which would enable the Assembly's secretariat to start this research programme.