Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
https://pace.coe.int

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Opinion 243 (2003)[1]

Budgets of the Council of Europe for the financial year 2004

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly welcomes the additional resources made available to the Organisation in 2003. 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 five main priorities, identified by the Committee of Ministers at its 104th Session in Budapest in May 1999.

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, combating social exclusion and developing cultural co-operation.

3. The Assembly welcomes the new management policies introduced and implemented by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in 2003, and wholeheartedly supports his proposed priorities for 2004, aimed at completing the Council of Europe's enlargement process, continuing to assist South-eastern Europe and the Caucasus, as well as Moldova and Ukraine in their democratic and peaceful development, and introducing a multidisciplinary approach to the Council of Europe's programmes and activities so as to regroup the Organisation's major functions and tasks in ten lines of action constituting its corporate mission.

4. Considering the imminent enlargement of the European Union and the work carried out within the Convention for the Future of Europe, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers develop the closest possible links with the European Union as well as more diversified forms of co-operation, in particular as regards intergovernmental and assistance programmes.

5. The Assembly deplores the fact that the Committee of Ministers has not agreed to the measures proposed by the Assembly in Opinions Nos. 224 (2001) and 236 (2002) to improve the Organisation's precarious budgetary situation. These measures are:

5.1. 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;

5.2. 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 the Assembly has been proposing since 1996. The Assembly reiterates this request, not only because the Committee of Ministers has so far failed to put forward convincing arguments against it, but also because it believes

1. Assembly debate on 31 March 2003 (9th Sitting) (see Doc. 9734, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Crema). Text adopted by the Assembly on 31 March 2003 (9th Sitting).

that a two-year system 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;

5.3. creating a special "Council of Europe" line within national budgets and allowing the ministries concerned – such as those responsible for cultural, education, legal and social matters – to contribute to the financing of certain intergovernmental activities, which the Assembly has been suggesting since 1996. 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;

5.4. reviewing the criteria set out in Resolution (94) 31 on the method of calculating the scales of member states' contributions to Council of Europe budgets so as to increase the weight of gross domestic product (GDP) vis-à-vis the population factor for calculating the contribution scales of member states. This change would favour countries which, albeit highly populated, are per capita less wealthy than others. A further proposal would be to amend Resolution (94) 31 by including a clause setting a minimum contribution to be paid by each member state covering at least the costs related to its membership of the European Court of Human Rights. 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;

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

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 particularwhen it comes to taking decisions on the Council of Europe's budget.

7. Considering 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.

8. The Assembly notes that the major share of the total budgetary growth for 2003, amounting to €6 490 000 for the whole Organisation, has been allotted to the European Court of Human Rights, which obtained additional funds totalling €5 461 000. The Assembly fears that further increases in the European Court's funding needs could be very detrimental to those of other Council of Europe activities if, in 2004 and 2005, the Committee of Ministers intends to finance the Court's financial requests by reallocating the funds available within the Organisation's ordinary budget. It is for this reason that the Assembly welcomes the Committee of Ministers' approval, in July 2002, of the 2003-2005 programme for the enhancement of the resources of the European Court of Human Rights and other departments involved in the execution of its judgments, enabling member states to plan for the Court's financial needs well in advance. This programme should ensure that member governments have already taken the necessary steps to increase the 2004 and 2005 budgets by the foreseen amounts in order to respond to the needs of the Court and other related departments without impinging on the rest of the Organisation.

9. 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 continuation of the financing of a Field Mission Reserve, amounting to €1.5 million in 2003, which enables the Council of Europe to react swiftly to unforeseen political developments. It encourages the Committee of Ministers to continue to make provision for this reserve, as the method of financing via voluntary contributions is inadequate to ensure the financial coverage of unforeseen, albeit necessary, expenditure.

10. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers carefully consider all the financial implications of new accessions. It therefore asks it 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, as pointed out in Assembly Opinions Nos. 224 (2001) and 236 (2002).

11. The Assembly encourages the Committee of Ministers to consider 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.

12. The Assembly invites the Committee of Ministers to consider carefully the difficult financial situation of the Organisation's field offices, which form part of a strategy designed not only to better monitor the implementation and impact of the 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 other international institutions active in similar fields, as pointed out in Assembly Opinion No. 236 (2002).

13. 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, as pointed out in Assembly Opinions Nos. 224 (2001) and 236 (2002).

14. 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 available to ensure the necessary enhancement of the Organisation's communications impact, through technological developments, an updated and efficient network of media contacts and a multi-lingual publications strategy. In this context, it welcomes the new press room, which provides the Council of Europe's Media and Press Directorate as well as invited journalists with modern equipment and up-to-date communication tools. Finally, the Assembly believes it is important to install in its Chamber a permanent system of automatic television cameras which would benefit all parts of the Council of Europe, through improved Internet transmission and television coverage of all events taking place in the Assembly Chamber.

15. The Assembly welcomes the Committee of Ministers' decision to set up a Pensions Reserve Fund, mainly financed from savings made through the switch to a private health insurance scheme, which would help member states meet their statutory obligation to pay the pensions of retired staff members.

16. In the light of the criteria contained in the 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. Finally, it asks the Committee of Ministers to increase the financial resources allocated to staff members' training courses, which amount to only 0.35% of the Organisation's ordinary budget.

17. In view of the ongoing negotiations on future salary adjustments for all six co-ordinated organisations – the Council of Europe, the European Centre for Medium-range Weather Forecasts, the European Space Agency, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Western European Union – 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 six 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 and national and international civil services, including the European Union, as pointed out in Assembly Opinion No. 236 (2002).