Parliamentary Assembly
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Opinion 244 (2003)[1]

Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly for the financial year 2004

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Thanks to its structural reform, during the last two years the Parliamentary Assembly has managed to maintain the overall cost of its functioning stable, while increasing its activities and raising its external profile. This reform, undertaken in 2001, which has resulted in a more focused, manageable and flexible structure, bore witness to the Assembly's willingness to constantly change and improve its working methods, so as to make them more cost-effective and more responsive to the ever-evolving needs of its members.

2. The Assembly hopes that the Committee of Ministers will agree to its budgetary proposals for the year 2004, representing an increase of €161 600 (some 1%) in real terms over its 2003 appropriations. These resources, which are particularly reasonable in relation to the Council of Europe's general budget (some 8%), are necessary not only to ensure its smooth functioning in the medium term but also to complete the Organisation's enlargement process, to carry out its expanded monitoring procedures and to pursue its political initiatives.

3. It points out that, given the Assembly's responsibility for completing 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.

4. Given the Organisation's ongoing budgetary constraints, the Assembly has decided to limit its staffing requests, for the year 2004, to two main priorities: one upgrading from A3 to A4 and one upgrading from A4 to A5. These proposals fall within the Assembly's overall strategy of having the posts, which have been directly affected by the Assembly restructuring, upgraded in view of the fact that the responsibilities and tasks of these staff members have been increased as a result of the wider terms of reference of the new Assembly committees or structures they serve.

5. Fully sharing the Committee of Ministers' renewed emphasis on the need for a higher profile for 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 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.

6. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers carefully consider the possibility of improving the performance of the Assembly's obsolete voting system, which was installed in the Assembly Chamber in the early 1980s by the European Parliament. In fact, one of the major problems is that the production of many components of this electronic device, including voting cards, has now been discontinued. Failure to meet this reasonable budgetary request could cause serious dysfunctioning in the running of the

1. Assembly debate on 31 March 2003 (9th Sitting) (see Doc. 9735, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Crema). Text adopted by the Assembly on 31 March 2003 (9th Sitting).

Organisation's parliamentary organ. Given all these reasons, the Assembly believes that it is crucial to raise the quality and the efficiency of its voting system so as to have an efficient and modern electronic device which could fully meet its specific needs.

7. 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 life of the Assembly, their secretarial and financial resources, which were only modestly increased in 2003 after five years of budgetary austerity, should now be increased in a way that fully covers the financial deficit so far incurred. Appended to this opinion are:

7.1. a table of requested increases for 2004 compared with the appropriations for 2003;

7.2. brief explanations for the proposed changes.

Voir tableau (Appendix)

Vote III – Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly

Head 0301 – Staff

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 87 posts.

At present, the Assembly structure consists of ten committees: seven comprised of 80 members (with 80 alternates), one of 76 members and two of 49 members (with 49 alternates). The permanent staff of the Assembly Secretariat comprises 87 posts:

1 A7 - 5 B5

2 A6 - 16 B4

10 A5 - 12 B3

11 A4 - 8 B2

19 A2/A3 - 1 C4

2 B6

To be fully operational, each of the seven committees with 80 members, as well as that with 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. Each of the other two committees of 49 members needs 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, two years after the implementation of the reform, several committees have faced difficulties in coping with the increased tasks and responsibilities resulting from their enlarged membership.

At present, the Assembly's Secretariat is organised so that 52 staff serve the Assembly's ten committees, with the remaining 35 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. Thanks to the Organisation's New Staff Policy, eight temporary staff were integrated in the Assembly's committees in 2003, thereby reinforcing its permanent structure. According to the above-mentioned structure, however, the Assembly's ten committees should be served by 56 staff. Remedy of this shortfall of four A-grade staff members is an essential precondition to adopting the structure deemed necessary for discharging the Assembly's tasks and responsibilities.

Given the Organisation's ongoing budgetary constraints, the Assembly has decided to limit its staffing requests, for the year 2004, to two main priorities, namely:

a. one upgrading from A3 to A4, so as to match the responsibilities and workload of the secretary of an 80-member committee with the administrative competence of an A4 grade;

b. one upgrading from A4 to A5, so as to match the responsibilities and workload of a staff member performing the duties both of Head of the Assembly Research and Documentation Unit and of the secretary of a 49-member committee with the administrative competence of an A5 grade;

Upgrading from A3 to A4

Migration, refugee and demographic issues have grown considerably in political importance in recent years. The tragic events of 11 September 2001 have added dramatically to the intensity of the political debate and relevant new laws are under consideration in most member states and at European Union level. On the one hand, there is pressure for stricter immigration policies; on the other, a need for immigration to respond to the specific labour market needs of the decreasing populations of most European countries. The work of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography embodies the fundamental principles of the Council of Europe and its Assembly: defending the dignity and human rights of those more vulnerable and less fortunate than other European citizens. Although the staff member concerned by this upgrading request has been performing the duties of a committee secretary for more than five years, her present administrative grade is still not consistent with her increased tasks and responsibilities. Apart from co-ordinating work within the committee secretariat and ensuring the necessary follow-up to the committee's political decisions, in recent years this staff member has developed a strong sense of initiative as well as an excellent ability to motivate her colleagues through her dynamic approach. Moreover, she has carried out, on several occasions, difficult field missions, which were an essential part of the preparatory work for many of the Assembly's reports. She has also demonstrated a great ability to undertake diplomatically challenging tasks in a dedicated and highly competent manner by taking full account of the diversity of national situations. Hence, it is in recognition of the committee's growing workload, her increased responsibilities and her genuine commitment to her work that the Assembly formulates this upgrading request from A3 to A4. The cost of this proposed upgrading would be €4 100.

One upgrading from A4 to A5

The Assembly regards research as an essential element of innovation and thus as an integral part of its institutional mission. The work of the Assembly Research and Documentation Unit focuses on issues of relevance to its institutional activities, concerning in particular the functioning of political and democratic institutions, respect for human rights, equal opportunities and social cohesion policies as well as cultural, economic, educational, environmental and migration matters. This Unit is also called upon to prepare, inter alia, detailed files for Assembly members, whether representing the Assembly or one of its committees in international and European conferences. This activity, requiring training and commitment, has increased considerably, particularly in recent years, since Assembly members are regularly invited to participate in external events dealing with the whole range of issues addressed by the Organisation's parliamentary organ.

It is worth noting, however, that there is only one A-grade staff member serving this important unit. He has sole responsibility for managing the growing level of demand from both committees and the Private Office of the President of the Assembly, for the selection and the drafting of texts, and for establishing and maintaining external contacts with Assembly members, national parliaments and other international fora. In addition, this staff member performs the duties of Secretary of the Committee on Rules of Procedures and Immunities: this requires not only a profound understanding of the highly technical issues involved, but also a high level of initiative, delicate political sensibilities, an outstanding level of commitment, heavy responsibilities and the personal investment of long working hours. Hence, as a result of the Assembly's growth in size and far-reaching internal restructuring, the tasks and responsibilities of this staff member have been significantly expanded. The Assembly is therefore convinced that it would be sensible to recognise this fact and to upgrade the post of this staff member, who has been directly concerned in the Assembly's restructuring and who obtained his last promotion in 1987. The cost of this proposed upgrading would be €4 000.

The overall cost of these proposed upgrading requests for 2004 would be €8 100.

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 been 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 of 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 2004 appropriations under this sub-head should be maintained at the same level in real terms as in 2003.

Sub-head 0000007 – Overtime – Statutory and other allowances

The 2004 appropriations under this sub-head should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 2003.

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

The 2004 appropriation under this sub-head should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 2003.

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

The 2004 appropriations under this sub-head should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 2003.

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. In 2003, the appropriations were increased to €623 900, an amount which took account of the inflation rate. Each group received a fixed allowance of some €27 500 and an additional per capitaallowance (some €800 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 1997-2003, have increased by 15.9% (corresponding to some €50 000). Thus, even if one takes account of the increase of some €10 000 that the political groups obtained in 2003, €40 000 would still be necessary simply to recover the financial deficit associated with the salaries of their staff. This unsatisfactory financial situation 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), No. 225 (2001) and No. 237 (2002), 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 2004, 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.

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.

Under this budgetary head, the only point of concern is the Assembly's voting system. This device was installed at the beginning of 1980s by the European Parliament, which decided to give it to the Assembly when it left the Council of Europe's premises in 1999. As it was the cheapest possible option, in 2000 the Assembly took the decision to use it by partially modifying the software so as to meet its specific needs. During the course of 2002, the Assembly was informed by the external firm responsible for ensuring the

maintenance and the functioning of the voting system, that the production of some of the technical components of this system, in particular voting cards, had now been discontinued. Moreover, the limits of the software installed in this obsolete voting system are such that it is not possible to register, at the same time, more than 1 024 identifying numbers, which are assigned to Assembly members whose rotation is high. This could engender additional problems. By way of example, it could happen that one Assembly Representative, who has left the Assembly for a certain period of time, returns to the Assembly and, by mistake, tries to vote with his/her old voting card. Since the identifying numbers available in the software of this voting system are limited, his/her identifying number could meanwhile have been assigned to another Assembly member. The problem arises when these two Assembly members try to cast their respective votes in the Chamber, as the voting system will not enable them to do so. This is a situation which has to be avoided. Given all these reasons, the Assembly believes that it is crucial to raise the quality and the efficiency of its voting system so as to have a modern device which would fully meet its specific needs. According to the preliminary estimates provided by the external firm, the total cost of a more up-to-date voting system would be some €60 000.

Appendix

VOTE III of the ordinary budget – Expenditure of the Assembly	Appropriations for 2003 - EUROS	Changes in real terms proposed for 2004 - EUROS
HEAD 0301 – Staff		
Sub-heads		
0000001 - Remuneration of staff recruited on established	6 946 200	8 100
0000003 - Remuneration and accessory charges of temporary	1 152 200	40 000
0000005 - Salary, allowances and social charges of the Secretary General of the	175 500	
0000007 - Overtime – statutory and other	21 300	
0000013 - Secondment of national civil servants to the	61 000	
0000016 - Recruitment, arrival and departure expenses – Home	61 000	
TOTAL HEAD 0301	8 417 200	48 100
HEAD 0302 – Allocation to the Assembly's political groups		
0000370 - Allocation to the Assembly's political	623 900	53 500
TOTAL HEAD 0302	623 900	53 500
HEAD 0303 – Supplies, services and other operational expenditure		
Sub-heads		
0000080 - Official	357 700	
0000095 - Representational expenditure, other official expenditure and travelling expenses of members of the Assembly	194 200	
0000115 – Interpretation	1 916 800	
0000116 – Translation	460 000	
0000124 - Publishing and printing	624 800	
0000125 – Outsourced production of documents	115 400	
0000129 - Consultation of experts	80 000	
0000162 - Expenditure pertaining to the Private Office of the President of the Assembly	82 900	
0000163 - Official expenses of the President of the Assembly	99 500	
0000166 - Expenses for inviting guests of the Parliamentary Assembly	121 600	
0000171 - Organisation of ad hoc conferences	133 400	
0000203 - Grant to the International Institute for Democracy	30 500	
0000204 - Modernisation of the Assembly's equipment	p.m.	
0000205 - European prizes	85 000	
0000206 - Operating and maintenance costs of the electronic voting system	39 400	60 000
0000250 - Co-operation and monitoring programme	652 400	
0000392 - Other expenditure not specifically provided for in this vote	65 000	
TOTAL HEAD 0303	5 058 600	
TOTAL VOTE III	14 099 700	161 600