Parliamentary Assembly
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Opinion 249 (2004)[1]

Expenditure of the Assembly for the financial year 2005

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Over the last three years, the Parliamentary Assembly has proved that it is committed to conducting the financial management of its limited appropriations with a commendable sense of economy and efficiency, while increasing the range of its activities, particularly those related to assistance programmes to national parliaments and the observation of elections in several member states. Yet following the accession of new member states and the reform of 2001 which has expanded the terms of reference of its ten parliamentary committees, these cost-cutting measures have placed an enormous strain on its overstretched human resources, who have seen a significant growth in their workload, deriving from the steep increase in the number of Representatives and Substitutes, of reports dealing with a wider variety of fields and of activities initiated by parliamentarians and political groups.

2. The Assembly therefore regrets that member governments have not agreed to its 2004 budgetary proposals and have continued to ignore the basic staffing and operational expenditure requirements of the Organisation's parliamentary organ, at a time when the European Union's enlargement makes it more important than ever for the Council of Europe to assert itself and consolidate its political action.

3. The Assembly hopes that the Committee of Ministers will meet its modest budgetary proposals for the year 2005, representing an increase of € 57 500 (less than 1%) in real terms over its 2004 appropriations. These resources, which are particularly reasonable in relation to the Council of Europe's general budget (about 8%), are necessary not only to ensure its smooth functioning in the medium term but also to continue to carry out its expanded monitoring procedures and to pursue its political initiatives. In this context, the Assembly encourages all its members to take action in their respective national parliaments in support of an increase in its financial and human resources.

4. It points out that, given the Assembly's responsibility for pursuing the enlargement process in the coming years, 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.

5. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers carefully consider the possibility of financing the Assembly's investment priorities, which could be staggered over a three-year period, including conversion work on the Chamber in order to create access for people with disabilities, the creation of separate access to the public gallery for visitors, the installation of a permanent television camera system and enlargement of the parliamentarians' bar area. It should also consider the possibility of installing a new, reliable voting system, as the present one has become obsolete and is increasingly expensive to maintain.

6. Given the Organisation's ongoing budgetary constraints, the Assembly has decided to limit its staffing requests for the year 2005 to two main priorities: one upgrading from A4 to A5 and one internal transfer of an A2/A3-grade staff member to the secretariat of the Interparliamentary Co-operation Unit to further develop the Assembly's important assistance programmes. The first proposal falls within the Assembly's overall strategy of upgrading those posts which have been directly affected by the Assembly restructuring to take account of the fact that the responsibilities and tasks of affected staff members have increased as a result of the wider

1. Assembly debate on 26 April 2004 (9th Sitting) (seeDoc. 10130, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Figel). Text adopted by the Assembly on 26 April 2004 (9th Sitting).

terms of reference of certain Assembly committees or structures. The Assembly is fully aware of the Committee of Ministers' firm opposition to any proposal aimed at increasing the number of permanent posts within the Secretariat of the Organisation, but hopes that the Secretary General of the Council of Europe will take all the necessary administrative steps to allow the transfer of an A2/A3-grade staff member to the secretariat of the Assembly, thereby strengthening the Assembly's Interparliamentary Co-operation Unit.

7. The Assembly wishes to further develop its interparliamentary co-operation and other external relations, as well as its communication policy, by making the fullest use of technological developments in the media field. This would make the Assembly's activities, public documents and information material more accessible to the general public, governments, parliaments and other institutions.

8. After five years of budgetary austerity, the Assembly welcomes the decision of the Committee of Ministers to adjust for inflation, for the second consecutive year, the financial appropriations of its five political groups, in particular in view of the growth in membership of each political group as a result of enlargement. Considering that the Assembly's work would greatly benefit from a strengthening of political groups, which reflect the pluralist democracies of the Organisation's member states, the Assembly invites member governments to provide each political group with a further instalment of €10 700 for 2005 so as to fully cover the financial deficit so far incurred.

9. The Assembly believes it is inappropriate to apply a results-based budgetary methodology to the Organisation's political organ, as requested by the national experts on the Budget Committee of the Council of Europe, without taking full account of its specific role, its evolving needs and its working methods. The Assembly firmly believes that it is in the interest of the Organisation to preserve and to strengthen its ability to innovate and react swiftly to unforeseen situations. It therefore cannot adopt in its current administrative methods a budgetary methodology which could become a dangerous straitjacket undermining its efficient and smooth functioning.

Appended to this opinion are:

1. a table of requested increases for 2005 compared with the appropriations for 2004;

2. brief explanations for the proposed changes.

VOTE III of the ordinary budget Assembly -Expenditure of the Assembly Appropriations for 2004 -Changes in real terms proposed for 2005

HEAD 0301 – Staff

Sub-heads/Articles

0000001 -Remuneration of staff recruited on established posts -EUROS 7 265 200 -EUROS 4 000

0000003 -Remuneration and accessory charges of temporary staff -EUROS 1 181 400

0000005 -Salary, allowances and social charges of the Secretary General of the Assembly -EUROS 179 100

0000007 -Overtime – statutory and other allowances -EUROS 21 300

0000013 -Secondment of national civil servants to the Assembly -EUROS 61 000

0000016 -Recruitment, arrival and departure expenses – Home leave -EUROS 61 000

TOTAL HEAD 0301 -EUROS 8 769 000 -EUROS 4 000

HEAD 0302 – Allocation to the Assembly's political groups

0000370 -Allocation to the Assembly's political groups -EUROS 637 600 -EUROS 53 500

TOTAL HEAD 0302 -EUROS 637 600 -EUROS 53 500

HEAD 0303 – Supplies, services and other operational expenditure

Sub-heads

0000080 -Official journeys -EUROS 365 600

0000095 -Representational expenditure, other official expenditure and travelling expenses of members of the Assembly -EUROS 198 500

0000115 -Interpretation -EUROS 1 963 100

0000116 -Translation -EUROS 471 500

0000124 -Publishing and printing -EUROS 630 200

0000125 – Outsourced production of documents -EUROS 117 900

0000129 -Consultation of experts -EUROS 80 000

0000162 -Expenditure pertaining to the Private Office of the President of the Assembly -EUROS 84 700

0000163 -Official expenses of the President of the Assembly -EUROS 101 700

0000166 -Expenses for inviting guests of the Parliamentary Assembly -EUROS 124 300

0000171 -Organisation of ad hoc conferences -EUROS 144 500

0000203 -Grant to the International Institute for Democracy -EUROS 30 500

0000204 -Modernisation of the Assembly's equipment -EUROS p.m.

0000205 -European prizes -EURO 85 000

0000206 -Operating and maintenance costs of the electronic voting system -EUROS 40 300

0000250 -Co-operation and monitoring programme -EUROS 666 800

0000392 -Other expenditure not specifically provided for in this vote -EUROS 65 000

TOTAL HEAD 0303 -EUROS 5 169 600

TOTAL VOTE III -EUROS 14 576 200 -EUROS 57 500

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 10 committees: 8 comprised of 82 members (with 82 alternates) and 2 of 50 members (with 50 alternates). The permanent staff of the Assembly secretariat comprises 87 posts:

1 -A7

2 -A6

10 -A5

11 -A4

19 -A2/A31

2 -B6

5 -B5

16 -B4

12 -B3

8 -B2

1 -C4

To be fully operational, each of the 8 committees with 82 members requires 4 A-grade staff (a Head of Secretariat at A5 level, a Secretary at A4 level and 2 co-secretaries at A2/A3 level), a B4 administrative assistant and a B2/B3 official. Each of the other 2 committees of 50 members needs 2 A-grade staff (a Secretary at A4 level and a co-secretary at A2/A3 level), a B4 administrative assistant and a 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 10 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 Co-operation, Administration and Finances, Communication, Information Technology and Research and Documentation Units. According to the above-mentioned structure, however, the Assembly's 10 committees should be served by 56 staff. Remedy of this shortfall of 4 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 2005, to 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 50-member committee with the administrative competence of an A5 grade.

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 or European conferences. This activity, which requires rigorous 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 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 Procedure and Immunities. This requires not only a profound understanding of the highly technical issues involved, but also a high level of initiative, acute political awareness, an outstanding level of commitment, extensive responsibilities and personal investment to manage a heavy workload. 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 overall cost of this proposed upgrading would be €4 000.

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

The 2005 appropriations under this sub-head should be maintained at the same level in real terms as in 2004.

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

The 2005 appropriations under this sub-head should be maintained at the same level in real terms as in 2004.

Sub-head 0000007 – Overtime – Statutory and other allowances

The 2005 appropriations under this sub-head should be maintained at the same level in real terms as in 2004.

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

The 2005 appropriations under this sub-head should be maintained at the same level in real terms as in 2004.

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

The 2005 appropriations under this sub-head should be maintained at the same level in real terms as in 2004.

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 qualitative and quantitative terms. 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 and 2004, the appropriations were increased to €623 900 and €637 600 respectively, a growth which only took account of the inflation rate.

Each group received a fixed allowance of about €27 500 and an additional per capita allowance (about €800 per member). It is important to underline that political groups spend, on average, almost 60% of their total appropriations on secretaries whose salaries, for the period 1997-2004, have increased by about 19% (corresponding to about €73 000). Thus, even if one takes account of the increase of about €23 000 that the political groups have obtained in the last two years, €50 000 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), No. 237 (2002) and No 244 (2003), 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 2005, 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 head concerning the Assembly's budgetary package, the Assembly wishes to put forward its investment priorities. These should be included in the future investment planning of the Council of Europe. After careful consideration, the Assembly has identified four major priorities. The first investment, and certainly the most urgent, concerns access for people with disabilities to the Chamber of the Assembly. This problem is more acute regarding access to the Presidential Table, which can be only be reached via a flight of stairs. At present a Vice-President of the Assembly, who uses a wheelchair, cannot have access to the Presidential Table. The second priority regards the Assembly's public gallery. The Organisation should consider creating separate access to the gallery for visitors. This investment would be useful in terms of security as it would enable ushers to prevent access to the rest of the building for groups of visitors who at present, once on the premises, can circulate freely without further control.

The third priority is related to the installation of a permanent system of television cameras controlled and managed by technicians sitting in the booth located on the upper right side of the Assembly Chamber. This new system would replace the current manual one involving several camera operators located on the floor of the Chamber, which prevents several Assembly members from seeing the President's Table. This third proposal would, of course, benefit the Council as a whole by improving television coverage of all events taking place in the Assembly Chamber. This investment should also include the complete refurbishing of the Presidential Table and the rostrum, which are old-fashioned and unsuited to the Assembly's needs. Finally, the fourth priority is linked to the parliamentarians' bar situated on the first floor of the Palais de l'Europe. With the increase in the number of Assembly members, the bar area, often used as a meeting point, is now

inadequate as it cannot accommodate large parliamentary delegations. Hence, it would be highly advisable to examine the possibility of enlarging the bar so as to render this section of the building more suitable to parliamentarians' evolving needs.

In recent years, there has been a rise in the number of requests from the national parliaments of member states. These requests have mainly involved study visits and specific seminars for members of parliaments and/or high-ranking officials aimed at enabling them to become more acquainted with the work of the Council of Europe as well as the Assembly's internal working methods and procedures. A member state also asked the Assembly to cover the cost of specific language training courses for members of parliament and staff who needed to enhance their knowledge of foreign languages, in particular the two Council of Europe official languages. The rapporteur wishes to stress that all beneficiary national parliaments have greatly appreciated the offer of such programmes, which have also provided the opportunity to exchange views on topics of mutual interest.

The complex tasks linked to the careful organisation of this vast array of activities are performed, in full compliance with the principles of sound financial management and efficiency, by two A-grade and two B-grade members of staff who also shoulder responsibilities related to the difficult and long preparation of the observation of elections at the request of the Bureau of the Assembly. Furthermore, this team is responsible for organising ad hoc conferences, such as that of the Speakers and Presidents of European Parliamentary Assemblies, entailing an additional workload. The increase in the Assembly's work in the sensitive field of interparliamentary co-operation has generated an urgent need for an additional A2/A3 post to reinforce the hard-pressed secretariat of the Interparliamentary Co-operation Unit. Given the Organisation's persistent budgetary constraints, this post could become available to the secretariat of the Assembly either via internal redeployment of staff or via the creation of a new post. The latter, however, is not a budget-neutral solution as it entails an increase of €81 000 in the Assembly's budget, thereby requiring the formal consent of the Committee of Ministers. Hence, in order to enable the Assembly to properly discharge its important function of assistance and not to frustrate the legitimate expectations of the national parliaments of less wealthy member states, the rapporteur believes that the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Committee of Ministers should work together with a view to arriving at a suitable solution, by taking full account of the Organisation's present budgetary situation.