Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Opinion 265 (2007)[1]

Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly for the 2008 financial year

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In pursuance of Resolution (53) 38 of the Committee of Ministers and Rule 24 of the Financial Regulations, the Parliamentary Assembly issues an opinion each year about the appropriations relating to its operation. The amounts allocated to the Assembly appear in Vote III of the ordinary budget of the Council of Europe, and these cover expenditure on staff, the costs associated with the functioning of its political groups and its own operating expenses, including the interparliamentary co-operation programme.

2. Since June 1975, the Committee of Ministers has allowed the budgetary package technique to be applied to that part of the Assembly's budget covering its operating costs. It has agreed that "the development of the Assembly's budget – which is an operating budget – cannot be linked with that of the Organisation as a whole, whose evolution often depends on decisions connected with the Organisation's work programme, and also on factors totally extraneous to operational expenditure which play their part in the annual variation of the budget total".

3. In its opinion on its 2007 expenditure, the Assembly made a major effort in agreeing to a significant reduction of €107 700. However, when it adopted the 2007 budget the Committee of Ministers imposed an additional cut of nearly €190 000. After taking account of inflation and adjustments to the appropriations for permanent staff salaries, this resulted in a real reduction in operational expenditure of over €300 000.

4. The Assembly regrets that these last minute reductions for 2007, which specifically affected certain elements of its operating budget (interpretation, translation and official journeys), were imposed on it without prior consultation or discussion.

5. The Assembly wishes to point out that in the case of its operating budget, which constitutes an overall package and has been acknowledged as such by the Committee of Ministers, it alone is in a position to make the adjustments necessary to stay within the total level of expenditure imposed by the Committee of Ministers.

6. The Assembly cannot accept the doublespeak of member states' governments, which loudly proclaim their total commitment to Council of Europe principles and then elect to finance the growing needs of the European Court of Human Rights by reducing resources allocated to the Organisation's machinery for co-operation, together with that of the Parliamentary Assembly. Such a policy could permanently weaken the Organisation and upset the financial and operational balance between the various institutions of the Council of Europe.

7. The Assembly is the Council of Europe's democratic conscience and has been the moving force behind its main legal instruments. Its debates, its election observation missions, its procedure for monitoring compliance with the obligations and commitments entered into by European states when they join the Organisation and its activities in the field of interparliamentary co-operation have made a major contribution to the Council of Europe's visibility. In view of its acknowledged role, it cannot accept the Committee of Ministers' current approach whereby expenditure arising from previous decisions is financed from a reduction in its own budget, and thus in its scope for action.

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1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf ofthe Assembly, on 24 May 2007 (see Doc.11279, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs andDevelopment, rapporteur: Mr Wille).

8. The Assembly regrets the unresponsive attitude of the Committee of Ministers in its reply to the Assembly's Recommendations 1728 (2005) on the budgetary powers of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and 1763 (2006) on the institutional balance at the Council of Europe and cannot accept the lack of clear answers to its calls for a better institutional balance between the Council of Europe's political bodies, and in particular its rejection of any changes to its budgetary powers.

9. Indeed, in a situation as difficult as that currently faced by the Council of Europe, and bearing in mind the progress made by other international parliamentary institutions in the area of budgetary powers, the Assembly believes that its powers regarding the adoption of the Council of Europe budget must be strengthened, particularly as far as its own appropriations are concerned.

10. The Assembly will only be able to fulfil its role of monitoring compliance with democratic standards and rules if it is granted the necessary resources.

11. In 2008, the Assembly will continue its monitoring procedures and fact-finding missions in several member states, the observation of elections in states that are subject to the monitoring or post-monitoring procedure, the interparliamentary co-operation programme and the implementation of the part of the programme concerned with training parliamentary officials of Council of Europe member states and of other parliamentary institutions.

12. It is also planned, with the agreement of the European Union's European Agency for Reconstruction, to continue the co-operation programme to support parliamentary institutions in Serbia and in Montenegro, 90% of which is financed by the agency and 10% by a Council of Europe contribution, divided equally between the Assembly and Vote II – Programme of Activities.

13. The Assembly will also continue to co-operate closely with other European parliamentary assemblies, such as the European Parliament and those of the OSCE and the CIS. As every year, a number of events are planned. Meanwhile, Assembly committees will hold several thematic hearings and conferences in 2008, including three or four major conferences, while the Sub-Committee on the Middle East will continue its co-operation with representatives of the Knesset and the Palestinian Legislative Council, in accordance with Resolution 1420 (2005) of the Assembly on prospects for peace in the Middle East.

14. Finally, in addition to the regular activities referred to above, the Assembly's 2008 work programme includes a conference of speakers and presidents of European parliamentary assemblies in Strasbourg, of which it will be meeting the entire cost. The conference has been held every two years since 1975, under the auspices of the Parliamentary Assembly.

15. The Assembly refers the Committee of Ministers to its previous opinions, in particular Opinions Nos. 249 (2004) and 257 (2005) on the expenditure of the Assembly for the financial year 2005 and 2006, in which it drew attention to its staffing needs in order to be able to carry out its tasks and responsibilities and the reasons why it considers that its budget should not be reduced.

16. The Assembly has made major efforts to cope with the reduction in its appropriations in 2007. It now believes that it has reached a minimum level of funding below which it cannot agree to go if its activities are to retain any credibility.

17. The Assembly considers that its 2008 budget must be maintained at the same level as in 2007 (with the imposed budget cuts reincorporated) in real terms (not including adjustment for inflation), to enable it to carry on its activities, fulfil its responsibilities as laid down in the Statute of the Council of Europe and continue to play an important role among the other European parliamentary institutions.

18. The Assembly is the Organisation's parliamentary body and political forum and makes a significant contribution to its democratic legitimacy. As such it must also bring its equipment into line with modern communication requirements. It therefore asks the Committee of Ministers to make one of the Assembly investment priorities in 2008 the replacement of the vote display panels by two large-format video walls, composed of plasma screens without borders, as proposed in Opinions Nos. 257 (2005) and 260 (2006) and not included in the 2007 budget.

19. The installation of these video walls would benefit the Council since the plasma screens would increase the potential uses of the Assembly Chamber by offering facilities for videoconferences and other large screen presentations. The new technologies involved have considerably reduced the cost of the investment and the Assembly hopes that its request will be taken into consideration quickly and treated as a priority in the revised investment proposals for 2008-12.

20. In conclusion, the Assembly feels more strongly than ever that the Committee of Ministers should grant it the budgetary powers to match its parliamentary and political status and considers that the Council's overall expenditure level should be set by agreement between itself and the Committee of Ministers.

21. Finally, the amendment to Article 38 of the Statute requested in Opinion No. 260 remains one of the objectives it wishes to see achieved.

Appended to this opinion are:

i. a table of the requests for 2008 compared with the estimated expenditure for 2007, presented according to the results-based budgeting (RBB) method, which has led the secretariat of the Assembly to divide the budget into two activity sectors:

a. plenary sessions;

b. functioning of the Assembly's various bodies.

Expenditure is similarly itemised in each sector;

ii. a brief explanation of the various items of expenditure;

iii. a table setting out the Assembly's work programme according to the RBB method.

Appendix 1 Appendix I

VOTE III of the ordinary budget – Expenditure of the Assembly	Appropriations for 2008 €	Expenditure foreseen for 2007 €
Head 0310 –Plenary Sessions		
Staff expenditure		
Sub-heads		
0000001 – Remuneration of staff recruited on established posts	1 472 300	1 454 600
0000003 – Remuneration and accessory charges of temporary staff	831 700	831 700
0000005 – Salary, allowances and social charges of the Secretary General of the Assembly	71 900	71 900
0000007 - Overtime – statutory and other allowances	p.m	p.m
Supplies, services and other operational expenditure		
Sub-heads		
0000080 – Official journeys	-	-
0000095 – Representational expenditure, other official expenditure and travelling expenses of members of the Assembly	30 000	30 000
0000115 – Interpretation	1 039 700	1 039 700
0000116 – Translation	169 200	169 200
0000124 – Publishing and printing	450 000	450 000
0000125 – Outsourced production of documents	28 600	28 600
0000129 – Consultation of experts	119 200	119 200
0000166 – Expenses for inviting guests of the Parliamentary Assembly	p.m.	p.m.
0000204 – Modernisation of the Assembly's equipment	42 900	42 900
0000206 – Operating and maintenance costs of the electronic voting system	p.m.	p.m.
0000250 – Co-operation and monitoring programme	15 000	15 000
0000392 – Other expenditure not specifically provided for in this vote	15 000	15 000
Total head 0310	4 274 500	4 256 400
Head 0311 – Functioning of the Assembly's various bodies		
Staff expenditure		
Sub-heads		
0000001 – Remuneration of staff recruited on established posts	6 736 700	6 577 400
0000003 – Remuneration and accessory charges of temporary staf	410 800	410 800
0000005 – Salary, allowances and social charges of the Secretary General of the Assembly	167 600	167 600
0000013 – Secondment of national civil servants to the Assembly	61 000	61 000
0000016 – Recruitment, arrival and departure expenses – Home leave	31 200	31 200
Supplies, services and other operational expenditure		

VOTE III of the ordinary budget – Expenditure of the Assembly	**Appropriations for 2008 €**	**Expenditure foreseen for 2007 €**
Sub-heads		
0000054 – Equipment	2 700	2 700
0000080 – Official journeys	341 500	341 500
0000095 – Representational expenditure, other official expenditure and travelling expenses of members of the Assembly	159 000	159 000
0000115 – Interpretation	996 400	996 400
0000116 – Translation	353 600	353 600
0000124 – Publishing and printing	161 100	161 100
0000125 – Outsourced production of documents	14 700	14 700
0000129 – Consultation of experts	56 900	56 900
0000162 – Expenditure pertaining to the Private Office of the President of the Assembly	110 600	110 600
0000163 – Official expenses of the President of the Assembly	123 700	123 700
0000166 – Expenses for inviting guests of the Parliamentary Assembly	p.m.	p.m.
0000171 – Organisation of ad hoc conferences	112 400	112 400
0000203 – Forum for the Future of Democracy	21 600	21 600
0000204 – Modernisation of the Assembly's equipment	p.m.	p.m.
0000205 – European prizes	80 100	80 100
0000250 – Co-operation and monitoring programme	725 600	725 600
0000370 – Allocation to Assembly's political groups	700 600	700 600
0000392 – Other expenditure not specifically provided for in this vote	64 300	59 300
Total head 0303	11 432 100	11 263 900
Total vote III	15 706 000	15 520 300

Appendix 2 Appendix II

Vote III – Expenditure of the Assembly

Heads 0310 and 0311 – Staff

These heads cover the basic salaries, allowances (non-recurring and periodic) and social cover of the permanent staff of the secretariat of the Assembly (87 posts), and those of temporary staff. Staff expenditure has been broken down into the Assembly's two sectors of activity: plenary sessions and the functioning of its various bodies.

The Assembly currently has 10 committees, 9 of which have 83 members (with 83 alternates), while the 10th has 51 (with 51 alternates). On 1 January 2007, the secretariat comprised 87 permanent posts and 1 specially-appointed official, divided up as follows:

1 specially appointed

1 A7 - 1 B6 - 1 C4

2 A6 - 4 B5

11 A5 - 16 B4

10 A4 - 13 B3

21 A2/A3 - 7 B2

The Assembly remains convinced, and experience in the last few years has shown, that to be fully operational each of the 9 83-member committees needs 4 A-grade staff members (1 A5 head of secretariat, 1 A4 Secretary and 2 A2/A3 co-secretaries), 1 B4 administrative assistant and 1 B2/B3 official. The 51-member committee needs 2 A-grade staff members (1 A4 secretary and 1 A2/A3 co-secretary), 1 B4 administrative assistant and 1 B2/B3 official. This structure means that the 10 Assembly committees should have a total of 58 members of staff (38 A-grades and 20 B-grades).

At present, the secretariat of the Assembly is organised so that the 10 Assembly committees have 50 staff members (30 A-grade and 20 B-grade) working for them. Thus there is a shortfall of 8 A-grade staff for these committees.

The remaining 37 staff members work for the Bureau of the Assembly, the Private Office of the President of the Assembly, the Table Office and the Interparliamentary Co-operation and Election Observation, Parliamentary Assistance, Administration, Human Resources and Finance, Communication, Information Technology and Research and Documentation units.

The current establishment table, however, does not allow the Secretary General of the Assembly to redeploy the Assembly’s permanent A-grade staff to committee secretariats in order to achieve the desired structure. In fact, some of the hardest-worked committees and units have experienced difficulties caused by the increased tasks and responsibilities resulting from their enlarged membership, their heavier workload and the political sensitivity of the subjects under consideration. The Assembly therefore requests the transfer or the establishment of 2 or 3 A2/A3 posts for the secretariat of the Assembly.

Heads 0310 and 0311 – Supplies, services and other operational expenditure

Since 1975, following a decision by the Committee of Ministers, the allocations under these heads have been voted in the form of a single appropriation, which continues to be divided into sub-heads. If the Assembly wishes to change the relative amounts in this package at a later date, either because of an overall reduction or for any other reason dictated by the implementation of the budget, such a change would be effected by the Secretary General at the Assembly’s request and in accordance with Article 31 of the Financial Regulations. Since 2005, and the adoption for the entire Organisation of a results-based budget, which has no effect at all on the above-mentioned decision, all operational expenditure of the Assembly, namely co-operation and monitoring programmes, publications, interpretation, translation, official journeys, experts, conferences, European prizes and so on, has been set out under Heads 0310 and 0311, corresponding to the new sector-based presentation of the Parliamentary Assembly’s activities. The first activity sector comprises expenditure related to the four Assembly part-sessions, while the second covers the operational expenditure of the Assembly’s various bodies.

In 2008, the Assembly will continue its monitoring procedures in several member states, the interparliamentary co-operation programme and the implementation of the part of the programme concerned with training parliamentary officials of Council of Europe member states and of other parliamentary institutions. It is also planned, with the agreement of the European Agency for Reconstruction, to extend the co-operation programme to support parliamentary institutions in Serbia and in Montenegro, 90% of which is financed by the agency and 10% by a Council of Europe contribution.

The Assembly committees will continue to organise several thematic hearings and conferences, (three or four major conferences are held each year). The Assembly will also continue to co-operate closely with other European parliamentary assemblies, such as the European Parliament and those of the OSCE and the CIS.

In addition, pursuant to Resolution 1420 (2005) on prospects for peace in the Middle East and the decision of the Assembly Bureau on 18 March 2005, the Sub-Committee on the Middle East will continue its co-operation with the Knesset and the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Finally, in its Opinion No. 260 (2006), the Assembly emphasised that its investment priorities should be included in the Council of Europe's future investment plans.

It wishes to reaffirm these priorities, with particular attention being given to the replacement of the vote display panels, located on either side of the presidential rostrum facing the Hemicycle, by two large-format video walls, composed of plasma screens without borders. This highly effective system can be used to project the image of the speaker or the invited guest, display the results of votes, or for supporting television presentations and videoconferences. Such facilities would increase the potential uses of the Hemicycle and benefit the Organisation as a whole.

Finally, the Assembly notes for the record that the President’s desk and the rostrum, which are no longer suited to the Assembly’s needs, should be completely refurbished.

Head 0311 – Allocation to the assembly's political groups

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

The allocation to the political groups is based on a lump sum for secretarial assistance to each of the existing groups and an additional per capita allocation according to membership.

Appendix 3 Appendix III

Plenary sessions

Intervention logic	Performance indicators	Sources of verification	Assumptions
Activity area objective The Parliamentary Assembly is able to fulfil its statutory tasks			
Expected Result 1 The preparatory work of part-sessions is ensured	The part-session order of business and the reports are sent out two weeks before the start of the session. For each debate, the date and the time for the tabling of amendments are specified	Part-session calendar Feedback from MPs	Administrative support from secretaries of national delegations and political groups
Expected Result 2 The efficient conduct of proceedings is ensured by the Table Office	Amendments are published in the 2 official languages within four hours after being deposited. Adopted texts are published in the 2 languages within 4 hours of their adoption. A minimum of 50% of registered speakers have the floor.	Part-session calendar Availability of texts and amendments in the distribution room for each debate Reports of debates List of speakers Feedback from MPs	Administrative support from secretaries of national delegations and political groups
Expected Result 3 Adopted texts are transmitted to the organs concerned	Proposals for the follow-up of adopted texts are ready and submitted to the Bureau of the Assembly for its meeting on the last day of the part-session.	Minutes of the Bureau Transmission of letters to the organs concerned	

Functioning of the Assembly's various bodies

Intervention logic	Performance indicators	Sources of verification	Assumptions
Activity area objective The smooth functioning of the Assembly's various bodies is ensured			
Expected Result 1 Committee meetings, seminars and conferences are efficiently organised	Meeting agendas, relevant documents and reports are ready for distribution on time	Minutes of committee meetings Proceedings of seminars and conferences	Ongoing political support from members of relevant committees
Expected Result 2 Efficient and effective assistance to the President of the Assembly is provided	Number of speeches, press releases and official visits prepared for the President	List of speeches, press releases and official visits	
Expected Result 3 Co-operation with national parliaments is further developed	Level of satisfaction of beneficiary national parliaments Quality of the co-operation offered	Annual report prepared by the secretariat and submitted for endorsement to the Bureau of the Assembly	Satisfaction of basie political standards necessary for establishing co-operation

Intervention logic	Performance indicators	Sources of verification	Assumptions
Expected Result 4 Financial resources to the Assembly's 5 political groups are provided	Timely provision of financial resources	Annual report by the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development on the use of the appropriations by the Assembly's 5 political groups	Annual financial statements are submitted by the Assembly's 5 political groups
Expected result 5 The Assembly's external profile is raised	Media coverage of the Assembly's activities Number of visitors to the Assembly's website	International and European press and news media The Assembly's website	