



Opinion 269 (2008)¹

Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly for the financial year 2009

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In pursuance of Resolution (53) 38 of the Committee of Ministers and Article 24 of the Financial Regulations, the Parliamentary Assembly issues an opinion each year concerning 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 cover its 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. In this context 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. A fundamental principle governs the management of the Assembly's budget: covering the funding needs of all its activities. The budget is accordingly managed with sufficient flexibility to allow the Assembly to react in real time to political developments and issues, which are often unpredictable. The Assembly must always be ready to react! However, if it is fully to play its role of watchdog regarding the observance of democratic standards and rules (as it has done, for example, with the report on secret detentions in Europe or debates under urgent procedure on political crises in certain member states), it must have the necessary resources.
4. To date, thanks to an extremely thrifty management, no activity envisaged by the Assembly or its bodies has been hindered for lack of funds, despite significant cuts in the appropriations allocated to it for the last two years.
5. This considerable reduction in its budget has obliged the Assembly to make huge efforts to rationalise its operations and its working methods (not least by discontinuing publication of the official printed version of the verbatim records of its proceedings in both official languages). However, even excellent management cannot make good a shortage of funds. The Assembly has now reached a point where any further decrease in its appropriations would necessitate drastic changes affecting its very functioning (shorter sessions, a reduction in the number of committees and in working languages used, etc.).
6. The Assembly refuses to go down this road as it would thereby be weakened, although it is the only purely European parliamentary institution in which national delegations representing the 47 member states of the Council of Europe regularly come together. The Assembly remains the only European parliamentary forum that allows the national parliaments of its member states to debate and work together with a view to finding solutions to the challenges confronting today's Europe. An approach leading to a weaker Assembly is all the more incomprehensible in a context where a number of member states have shown their determination to reinforce the role played by their national parliaments in their countries' political systems.

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 29 May 2008 (see Doc. 11600, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Wille).*



7. The Assembly is the Council of Europe's democratic conscience and has been the driving 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 and credibility. In view of its acknowledged role, the Assembly cannot accept the reasoning whereby its budget, and thus its scope for action, is reduced year after year, so as to meet expenditure needs arising from earlier decisions taken by the Committee of Ministers which did not concern it.

8. In 2009 the Assembly will continue its monitoring procedures and fact-finding missions in a number of member states, the observation of elections in states subject to the monitoring or post-monitoring procedure, and the interparliamentary co-operation programme spanning several years. The part of the programme concerned with training parliamentary officials of Council of Europe member states and of other parliamentary institutions will be maintained.

9. In accordance with its [Resolution 1548 \(2007\)](#) on the progress of its monitoring procedure, the Assembly will provide the national parliaments concerned with all necessary support through its parliamentary co-operation and assistance programmes. The purpose of this co-operation is to assist parliaments in seeking solutions to the problems identified in the Assembly's relevant reports and to enhance the visibility of the Assembly's activities among members of parliament, experts, legal specialists and parliamentary officials.

10. Moreover, in view of the experience acquired through the co-operation programme with the European Union's European Agency for Reconstruction to support parliamentary institutions in Serbia and in Montenegro (which will be extended until December 2008), the Assembly intends to negotiate with the European Union, and in partnership with the European Parliament (consistent with the logic of the co-operation agreement concluded between the two institutions), another co-operation programme specifically aimed at supporting parliamentary institutions in member states (in particular in South-East Europe and the South Caucasus). It can indeed be noted that, paradoxically, the Council of Europe and the European Union have no joint project with a parliamentary dimension.

11. The Assembly will also continue to co-operate closely with other European parliamentary assemblies, with whom, as every year, a number of events are planned. For their part, the Assembly's committees will hold a number of thematic hearings and conferences, essential in order to give due consideration to European citizens' concerns and problems and propose appropriate responses.

12. Lastly, since 2009 marks the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the Council of Europe, the Assembly is considering the possibility of holding a series of events on the occasion of its part-sessions, including:

12.1. a new session of the Youth Assembly bringing together young people from the Council of Europe's member states;

12.2. a major debate on the achievements of sixty years of human rights protection in Europe, together with a ceremony to mark the award of the Assembly's Human Rights Prize for the first time.

13. The Assembly therefore considers that its budget for 2009 must at least be maintained at the level stipulated in its [Opinion No. 265 \(2007\)](#), that is a sum of €15 706 600 (not including the adjustment for inflation), so as to enable it to remain a credible player and to fulfil all its responsibilities as defined in the Statute of the Council of Europe.

14. In this connection, the Assembly regards as encouraging the statements made by the leading figures who addressed it last January, in particular Mr Robert Fico and Mr Ferenc Gyurcsány, the prime ministers of the Slovak Republic and Hungary respectively, not forgetting Mr Ján Kubiš, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic and Chairman in Office of the Committee of Ministers, concerning the role and the resources of the Council of Europe.

15. The Assembly believes the time has come to abandon the logic of zero real growth in the ordinary budget of the Council of Europe, since it can be seen that a majority of member states, not least certain "major contributors", in fact finance part of the Organisation's activities through voluntary contributions (in addition to their obligatory contributions), representing on average more than €5 million of additional resources per year.

16. The Assembly continues to regret the unresponsive attitude of the Committee of Ministers in its reply to [Recommendation 1728 \(2005\)](#) on the budgetary powers of the Assembly and [Recommendation 1763 \(2006\)](#) on the institutional balance at the Council of Europe and still calls for a better institutional balance between the Council of Europe's political bodies and, in particular, a revision of its budgetary powers.

17. Bearing in mind the progress made concerning the budgetary powers of other international parliamentary institutions, the Assembly considers that its powers with regard to the adoption of the Council of Europe's budgets, particularly as far as its own appropriations are concerned, must be strengthened. The Assembly also reiterates that it would like the expenditure ceiling under the Council of Europe's ordinary budget to be set by agreement between itself and the Committee of Ministers.

18. The Assembly refers the Committee of Ministers to its previous opinions, in particular Opinions Nos. 249 (2004), 257 (2005) and 260 (2006), in which it drew attention to its staffing needs in order to be able to properly carry out its tasks and responsibilities, and to the reasons why its budget should not be reduced. It therefore requests the transformation of the seven fixed-term positions included in its budget into permanent posts (see Appendix II).

19. As the Organisation's parliamentary body and political forum, the Assembly must bring its equipment into line with modern communication requirements. It therefore asks the Committee of Ministers to replace the vote display panels with two large-format video walls composed of plasma screens without borders, as proposed in its previous Opinions Nos. 257 (2005), 260 (2006) and 265 (2007), which were not included in the 2008 budget.

20. Installing these video walls would benefit the Organisation, in particular in the context of its 60th anniversary, since the plasma screens would enhance the potential uses of the Assembly Chamber by offering facilities for video conferences 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 given rapid effect and treated as a priority in the revised investment proposals for 2008-12.

21. Finally, the amendment to Article 38 of the Statute requested in [Opinion No. 260 \(2006\)](#) remains one of the objectives it wishes to see achieved.

22. Appended to this opinion are:

- i. a table of the requests for 2009 compared with the estimated expenditure for 2008, presented according to the results-based budgeting (RBB) method, which has been simplified since the secretariat of the Assembly decided to present the budget under a single activity area: functioning of the Assembly;
- ii. a brief explanation of the main items of expenditure;
- iii. a table setting out the Assembly's work programme according to the RBB method.

Appendix 1

Vote III of the ordinary budget – Expenditure of the Assembly	Appropriations for 2009 €
Head 0311 – Functioning of the Assembly	
Staff expenditure	
Sub-heads	
0000001 – Remuneration of staff recruited on established posts	8 305 600
0000003 – Remuneration and accessory charges of temporary staff	862 000
0000046 – Remuneration of staff on fixed-term positions	399 000
0000005 – Salary, allowances and social charges of the Secretary General of the Assembly	249 300
0000007 – Overtime – statutory and other allowances	0
0000013 – Secondment of national civil servants to the Assembly	0
0000016 – Recruitment, arrival and departure expenses – home leave	24 800
Total staff expenditure	9 840 700
Supplies, services and other operational expenditure	
Sub-heads	
0000054 – Equipment	12 700
0000080 – Official journeys	300 000
0000095 – Representational expenditure, other official expenditure and travelling expenses of members of the Assembly	168 500
0000115 – Interpretation	2 020 800
0000116 – Translation	510 000
0000124 – Publishing and printing	600 500
0000125 – Outsourced production of documents	72 000
0000129 – Consultation of experts	201 000
0000162 – Expenditure pertaining to the Private Office of the President of the Assembly	87 600
0000163 – Official expenses of the President of the Assembly	105 600
0000166 – Expenses for inviting guests of the Parliamentary Assembly	0
0000171 – Organisation of ad hoc conferences	111 300
0000204 – Modernisation of the Assembly's equipment	0
0000205 – European prizes	81 500
0000206 – Operating and maintenance costs of the electronic voting system	41 000
0000250 – Co-operation and monitoring programme	740 000
0000370 – Allocation to the Assembly's political groups	713 200
0000392 – Other expenditure not specifically provided for in this vote	100 200
Total supplies, services and other operational expenditure	5 865 900
Total Vote III	15 706 600

Appendix 2

Vote III – Expenditure of the Assembly - Staff expenditure

This appropriation corresponds to the basic salaries, allowances (non-recurring and periodic) and social cover of the permanent staff of the secretariat of the Assembly (87 posts, including 1 specially appointed official) and of temporary staff (including 7 positions).

The Assembly currently has 10 committees, 9 of which have 84 members (with 84 alternates, except for the Monitoring Committee), while the 10th has 27 members (with 27 alternates). On 1 January 2008 the secretariat comprised 87 permanent posts, 7 positions and 1 specially appointed official, breaking down as follows:

Permanent posts:

1 specially appointed official

1 A7 - 1 B6 - 1 C4

2 A6 - 4 B5

11 A5 - 16 B4

10 A4 - 13 B3

21 A2/A3 - 7 B2

Positions:

4 A1/2 - 1 B3

2 B2

At present, the secretariat of the Assembly is organised so that the 10 Assembly committees have 52 staff members working for them (30 A-grade and 20 B-grade) and 2 temporary staff members (including 1 B4 assigned to an A-grade post).

The remaining 42 staff members (37 permanent posts and 5 fixed-term positions) work for the Bureau of the Assembly, the Private Office of the President of the Assembly, the Table Office, the Interparliamentary Co-operation and Election Observation Unit, the Parliamentary Assistance Unit, the Administration, Human Resources and Finance Unit, the Communication Unit, the Information Technology Unit or the Research and Documentation Unit.

Previous years' experience shows that the tasks of the 7 positions are not linked with the implementation of a programme but correspond to permanent work financed by the general budget of the Assembly. Therefore, to conform with reality, the 7 positions should be transformed into permanent posts.

Supplies, services and other operational expenditure

Since 1975, following a decision by the Committee of Ministers, these allocations have been voted in the form of a single appropriation, which continues to be divided into sub-heads. If the Assembly wished to change the relative amounts in the 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 carried out by the Secretary General at the Assembly's request and in accordance with Article 31 of the Financial Regulations. For 2009, the Assembly has decided to simplify the log frame drawn up under the RBB method so as to present its activities under a single budget head (instead of two in previous years).

The draft budget for 2009 amounts to €15 706 000 in real terms (not including inflation and salary adjustments for 2009). The appropriations can be analysed as follows:

Permanent and temporary staff - €9 840 700

Interpretation - €2 020 800

Translation - €510 000

Printing of documents - €600 500

Allocation to the political groups - €713 200

Sub-total - €13 685 200

Activities - €2 021 400

Total - €15 706 600

In 2009, the Assembly will continue its monitoring procedures, its election observation missions in member states, its interparliamentary co-operation programme and the part of the programme concerned with training parliamentary officials of Council of Europe member states and of other parliamentary institutions.

Under its parliamentary assistance programme, the Assembly will continue to hold thematic seminars (linked to the five main fields of action of the Council of Europe) for officials and experts of the member states' parliaments. The objective of these programmes is to reinforce co-operation with the national parliaments, to enhance the visibility of the Parliamentary Assembly's activities and respond to issues and problems identified in various Assembly reports, including those issued by its Monitoring Committee.

It can indeed be noted that, in certain member states of the Council of Europe, particularly those in transition, the parliamentary institution, as the genuine organ of representation in the national political system, is a younger body than the executive, and consequently needs reinforced co-operation to be able to develop its democratic functioning.

The Parliamentary Assembly has a particular role to play here. This is because it is the only purely European parliamentary institution in which national delegations representing the 47 member states of the Council of Europe regularly come together (for twenty days per year during the part-sessions in Strasbourg, plus seventy to eighty days' work between sessions on the occasion of the meetings of the committees and sub-committees, not to mention other meetings, such as Bureau meetings or those of the Standing Committee). The Assembly is the only organisation, apart from the European Parliament, that offers such a frequency and density of activity by members of national parliaments within a single international body.

There are also plans to negotiate with the European Union a specific co-operation programme aimed at supporting parliamentary institutions. This new programme will be devised in the light of the experience acquired through the implementation of the co-operation programme targeting Serbia and Montenegro, for which 90% of the funding came from the European Reconstruction Agency, and which cannot be extended beyond 31 December 2008.

The Assembly committees will continue to organise a number of thematic hearings and conferences (three or four major conferences are held each year). The Assembly will also continue to co-operate closely with the other European parliamentary assemblies (the European Parliament and those of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), etc.), or international parliamentary assemblies (the Pan-African Parliament, the Asian Parliamentary Assembly, etc.).

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.

Lastly, concerning investment priorities to be included in the Council of Europe's future investment plans, the Assembly would like particular attention to be paid to the replacement of the vote display panels, located on either side of the presidential rostrum facing the chamber, by two large-format video walls, composed of plasma screens without borders, as already proposed in earlier opinions. Such facilities would increase the potential uses of the Assembly Chamber and benefit the Organisation as a whole, especially in the context of the 60th Anniversary of the Council of Europe.

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 amount, which varies according to membership.

Appendix 3

Intervention logic	Functioning of the Assembly		
	Performance indicators	Sources of verification	Assumptions
Activity area objective			
Ensure the smooth functioning of the session and of the Assembly's various bodies.			
Expected result 1 The part-sessions are efficiently organised and run, and satisfy Assembly members' expectations.	At least 50% of registered speakers are given the floor. Adopted texts are transmitted to the bodies concerned.	List of speakers. Compilation of adopted texts. Minutes of the Bureau of the Assembly. Statement made by the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly to the Ministers' Deputies.	Support from secretaries of national delegations.
Expected result 2 Committee meetings, seminars and conferences take place in accordance with members' decisions.	Committee meetings are planned. Meeting agendas, documents and reports are ready in good time.	Agendas and minutes of committee meetings. Proceedings of seminars and conferences.	Availability of members. Support from secretaries of national delegations.
Expected result 3 Interparliamentary co-operation, including observation of elections and assistance for national parliaments, is managed efficiently, taking due account of political developments.	Co-operation activities are brought into line with wishes and needs expressed. Election observation missions are organised in accordance with the decisions of the Bureau of the Assembly.	List of activities. Reports on election observation missions.	Support from parliaments and political groups.
Expected result 4 Raising of the Assembly's external profile.	Media coverage of Assembly activities is analysed. Stock is taken of press releases and the number of visitors to the Assembly's website.	Press and news media. Collection of statistics on media coverage.	