

Opinion 288 (2015)¹

Budget and priorities of the Council of Europe for the biennium 2016-2017

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Europe is experiencing a period of political and economic tension, characterised by the consequences of the economic and financial crises of 2008, consolidation in the public finances of many member States and serious violations of the rule of law and human rights. These phenomena undermine democratic stability and contribute to the emergence of political extremism, racism and intolerance. The Parliamentary Assembly is convinced that the Council of Europe has the recognised authority and expertise, as well as the appropriate mechanisms, to be an indispensable partner in European co-operation aimed at confronting these challenges and assisting the member States to find effective solutions to the present problems.
2. The member States trust the Council of Europe to provide a coherent response to these crises. However, in exchange for their financing, they expect the Organisation to offer real added value as compared with its cost, in other words to be effective and efficient.
3. The Assembly notes that, during his first term of office, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, implemented a series of measures intended to enhance the effectiveness of the Organisation while reducing its costs, in particular its wage bill, which led to a saving of €15 million over the period under consideration.
4. The Assembly also welcomes the Secretary General's efforts to reinforce the Organisation's capacity to raise extrabudgetary resources (voluntary contributions by member and non-member States and by the European Union, signature of joint programmes with the European Union and other sources of funds) so as to make the Council of Europe even more operational. In this context, the Assembly underlines the importance of its co-operation programmes that are financed with this type of resources and which focus on the problems identified in the various reports it has adopted.
5. The Assembly nonetheless considers that the temporary nature of these additional resources and their increasing share in the overall budget of the Council of Europe may, in the medium term, jeopardise the Organisation's financial equilibrium and the planning of its activities. This is because such resources cannot be used to offset the costs inherent in their management or to cover financing needs in respect of traditional activities or essential expenditure on investments in the upkeep, modernisation and preservation of the value of the Organisation's assets (in particular for building maintenance and information technology needs).
6. In view of the challenges Europe faces from violence and conflicts, and the resulting democratic instability, the Assembly considers that the Council of Europe should have greater means to fulfil its role and is concerned about the repercussions, in the medium and the long term, of the Committee of Ministers' decision to continue to apply the principle of zero nominal growth to member States' contributions to the upcoming budget for the biennium 2016-2017.
7. The Assembly would like the Committee of Ministers to adopt flexible budgetary measures, as suggested in its previous opinions on the budgets and priorities of the Council of Europe, namely the ability to carry forward unspent appropriations without restriction from one year to the next within a biennial budget and

1. *Assembly debate* on 21 April 2015 (13th Sitting) (see [Doc. 13743](#), report of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Rudy Salles). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 21 April 2015 (13th Sitting).



the creation, in the Council of Europe's accounts, of a reserve account to be used to cover investment expenditure, fed with the full amount, or a percentage to be determined, of any unspent balance at the end of a biennial budget period. Such a flexible approach to budget planning would enhance the effectiveness of the Council of Europe's activities and help make them better suited to the changing situations of beneficiary countries.

8. The Assembly welcomes the Turkish Government's proposal to become a major contributor to the budgets of the Council of Europe with effect from 1 January 2016 and thanks this country's government and parliament for their support in strengthening the Organisation's capacity to fulfil its role.

9. The Assembly has taken note of the motion for a recommendation tabled by several members concerning the allocation of seats in the Parliamentary Assembly in respect of Turkey. This proposal aims to remedy the consequences of this country's under-representation (in terms of its population, Turkey ranks third among the Council of Europe member States) by setting the number of seats to which Turkey is entitled at 18 and by including Turkish among the Assembly's working languages.

10. The Assembly calls on the Committee of Ministers to accept the Turkish Government's proposal, without, however, reducing the amounts of the other member States' contributions to the Organisation's budgets.

11. Regarding the priorities for 2016 and 2017, the Assembly takes note of the Secretary General's strategic choices concerning the following priority fields:

11.1. strengthening the European Court of Human Rights and the principle of shared responsibility with the various Council of Europe bodies active in this field (institutional organs such as the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Commissioner for Human Rights and other standard-setting mechanisms of the Council of Europe);

11.2. reinforcing co-operation with the member States;

11.3. upholding democratic principles;

11.4. enhancing assistance to neighbouring countries;

11.5. strengthening the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163);

11.6. strengthening cohesion between the Secretary General and the statutory organs, in particular the Parliamentary Assembly;

11.7. increasing the Council of Europe's operational capacity.

12. Following the terrorist attacks perpetrated in Paris, in Copenhagen and recently in Tunis, the Assembly gives its support to the Secretary General's initiatives for combating terrorism, radicalisation and extremism by making the best possible use of all the legal instruments of the Council of Europe and proposing new instruments.

13. The Assembly is firmly convinced that the Council of Europe's strategy for fighting terrorism should be long term and that it needs to encompass not just legal instruments, but also other activities of the Organisation, namely democratic governance, including the various aspects of elections, the fight against corruption, education, teaching, culture and inter-faith dialogue.

14. The Assembly points out that it has acted at its own level by establishing the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance, a network of parliamentarians whose aim is to campaign against racism, hatred and intolerance in co-operation with their national parliaments, at the national and European levels, and a parliamentary anti-corruption platform.

15. The Assembly considers that the Council of Europe should increase its role in addressing, at pan-European level, the challenges to human rights and social cohesion linked to migration flows, including refugees and asylum seekers and migrants in an irregular situation. The Assembly regrets that there is no specific intergovernmental committee in the Organisation to deal with these issues. The establishment of such a body would allow for enhanced and co-ordinated action, and greater efficiency in this respect.

16. The Assembly considers that all these activities must go hand in hand with the creation of a coherent, Europe-wide system of human rights protection and reinforced co-operation with member States in combating terrorism, while ensuring that States do not adopt measures which conflict with the principles and case law

arising from the application of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5). In this context, the Assembly wishes to underline the legislative role that its members must play as elected representatives sitting in the national parliaments of the member States.

17. With regard to the effectiveness of the European Convention on Human Rights and the follow-up given to the Brighton Declaration of 2012, the Assembly recalls the importance of giving the Council of Europe the financial means to fulfil its obligations without undermining its other activities and programmes, as the Assembly already proposed in its [Resolution 1856 \(2012\)](#) on guaranteeing the authority and effectiveness of the European Convention on Human Rights and in particular its [Recommendation 1812 \(2007\)](#) on the political dimension of the Council of Europe budget, where it suggested that minimum scales be set for member States' contributions so as to cover at least the administrative cost of a judge at the European Court of Human Rights.

18. In order to enable journalists from all member States, in particular States under a monitoring procedure or engaged in post-monitoring dialogue with the Assembly, to freely and independently cover Council of Europe activities, the Assembly invites the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to reintroduce the funding of invitations for journalists to attend major events organised by the Organisation, including the part-sessions of the Assembly.