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Budget and priorities of the Council of Europe for the biennium 2018-2019

Report[1]
Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs
Rapporteur: Mr George LOUCAIDES, Cyprus, Group of the Unified European Left

Summary

Europe is faced with many tensions linked to the rise of populism and extremism, the migrant and refugee crisis, the terrorist threat, and more generally increased poverty and social exclusion. In order to be able to respond to all of these challenges, the Council of Europe must strengthen its action in the field of social rights and take into account in its priorities certain sustainable development goals of the United Nations, which are consistent with its mandate. Consequently, the Organisation must strengthen its intergovernmental co-operation and promote its conventions, including by inviting the European Union to join those open to it. Such a challenge can only be met if Council of Europe member States resume real growth in the Organisation's budget.

1. Reference to committee: Bureau decision, Reference 4270 of 23 January 2017.

Contents **Page**

A. Draft opinion 3
B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr George Loucaides, rapporteur 6
1. Introduction 6
2. Audit of the 2014 and 2015 accounts 6
3. 2015 7
4. 2016 7
5. Priorities for 2018-2019 8

A. Draft opinion[2]

1. Europe must face up to increasingly high tensions linked to the threat of terrorist attacks, ongoing hostilities in conflict zones, the migrant and refugee crisis, and a persistently fragile economic situation in a number of member States. Moreover, widening economic and social inequalities in Europe and beyond, as well as increased poverty and social exclusion, and also the insufficient response by public institutions to these challenges, provide a breeding ground for populism, extremism, racism and xenophobia throughout Europe.

2. These trends undermine the core values and principles of the Council of Europe. The Parliamentary Assembly considers that the Council of Europe, through its extensive regional coverage and strong system of values, is the European organisation best placed to combat these threats, counter current excesses and rise to these challenges, by reaffirming the need to defend its values, namely human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

3. The Assembly fully concurs with the analysis that the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, presented in his speech entitled "Understanding populism and defending European democracies", delivered before the Assembly on 24 January 2017. For nearly 70 years, the Council of Europe has sought to ensure that all member States follow the principles of rule of law, pluralist democracy and human rights. As the Secretary General advocated, this "precious legacy" must be protected.

4. For the forthcoming 2018-2019 biennial programme and budget, the Council of Europe's Secretary General has identified three priority challenges which the Council of Europe must take up:

4.1. responding to the populist threat, by giving European citizens effective parliaments, vibrant and plural media, courts in which they can trust, a civil society that offers them the means to act, and, what is key, social rights in the fields of employment, health care and education, all within inclusive societies;

4.2. protecting the rights of migrants and refugees through action by all Council of Europe bodies;

4.3. combating terrorism by focusing initiatives on its funding, particularly through trafficking of cultural artefacts, which the Secretary General denounces as a trade in "blood antiquities".

5. The Assembly reaffirms the position set out in its Opinion 288 (2015) on the Council of Europe's budget and priorities for the 2016-2017 biennium, namely that all action taken by the Council of Europe 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 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

6. Regarding the migrant and refugee issue, the Assembly regrets that the Council of Europe no longer has an intergovernmental committee to cover this matter. However, it commends the Secretary General's initiative of appointing a special representative on migration and refugees tasked with promoting and co-ordinating the Organisation's work in this area.

7. Against this backdrop, the Assembly fully supports the new Council of Europe Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property (CETS No. 221), which was one of the core priorities of the Cypriot Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers and is the only international treaty devoted to criminal law measures and sanctions against illegal activities in the field of cultural heritage. The Assembly invites all Council of Europe member and non-member States to sign and ratify it as soon as possible.

8. However, there can be no response to the challenges mentioned by the Council of Europe's Secretary General without working towards a genuinely social Europe across the entire continent, an objective also shared by the European Union in the Rome Declaration of 25 March 2017. Consequently, the Assembly would like the programme of activities in the next biennial budget to be reinforced at a social rights level, the goal being to combat ever-widening social and economic inequalities in Europe. The Assembly also intends to support all the efforts aimed at making the European Social Charter the foundation underlying the European Union's social pillar, to help build a more harmonised, social and inclusive Europe.

2. Draft opinion adopted unanimously by the committee on 26 April 2017.

9. The Assembly would like firm initiatives to be taken so that all Council of Europe member States are Party to the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163), which contains the most advanced social rights, and for them to adopt the collective complaints system provided for in the Charter, either by signing and ratifying the additional protocol on a system of collective complaints (ETS No. 158), or by accepting Article D of the revised Social Charter.

10. The Assembly would also like the Council of Europe's work programme for the 2018-2019 biennium to reflect United Nations Resolution 70/1 "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", adopted on 25 September 2015, which sets 17 sustainable development goals, at least eight of which are consistent with the Council of Europe's priorities.

11. The Assembly recognises that the reform process led by the Council of Europe's Secretary General since his appointment in 2009, to revitalise the Organisation and give it fresh political impetus, has yielded good results. By redesigning the Council of Europe's action programmes so that they reflect the challenges facing member States, and by strengthening priority areas – especially the implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, matters of equality and human dignity, freedom of expression and of the media, measures to combat terrorism and its financing, and the migrant and refugee crisis – the Secretary General has restored the Organisation's standing.

12. In this context, the Assembly fully supports the various thematic or national action plans introduced by the Secretary General. By implementing specific practical projects, the Council of Europe has been able to provide a targeted number of countries, in particular in eastern Europe and South-East Europe, with substantial assistance to enable them to bring themselves into line with the requirements of both the Council of Europe and the European Union.

13. With more specific regard to thematic action plans, the Assembly strongly encourages the Secretary General's initiative aimed at establishing an action plan for unaccompanied migrant children, echoing the work of the Assembly and its parliamentary campaign to end immigration detention of children, launched in 2015 and funded through Switzerland's generosity.

14. However, promoting effective long-term solutions to meet all of the challenges facing member States requires a new commitment from the Council of Europe. This will only be possible if the Organisation increases its standard-setting capacity, implemented through its network of intergovernmental committees, whose terms of reference could be reviewed to take account of the aforementioned challenges.

15. That being the case, the Assembly regrets that the standard-setting pillar – the historic heart of the Council of Europe and of intergovernmental co-operation – has taken something of a back seat in relation to technical assistance programmes.

16. In 2012, the intergovernmental sector was radically reorganised to cope with pressure on the Council of Europe's Ordinary Budget, accentuated with effect from 2014 by the Committee of Ministers' decision to impose the principle of zero nominal growth in member States' obligatory contributions to the Ordinary Budget. As a result of the fewer financial resources available for intergovernmental co-operation, there has been a reduction in the number of steering committees (fewer committees with broader terms of reference) and in their meetings (one or two a year).

17. The weakness of this strategy is that it focuses attention and resources on a limited number of member States. Yet the role of the Council of Europe is to cater for the needs of 47 European States. Fully restoring this role would entail stepping up intergovernmental co-operation, which takes the form of two pillars: standard setting and monitoring the application of those standards. The Assembly is convinced that tangible responses can be given to the current challenges if States pool their experience. For this to happen, the current intergovernmental committees (steering and subordinate) would have to be given the additional resources needed to be able to broaden their mandates and increase the frequency of their meetings, which are essential steps if effective tools are to be created.

18. This strengthening of co-operation mechanisms also involves promoting Council of Europe treaties on one hand, especially in respect of the European Union, which has not taken full advantage of the existing possibilities for signing up to Council of Europe treaties – it is Party to only 11 of the 54 conventions open to it – and on the other hand clarifying the attitude of States members of the Council of Europe and of the European Union regarding their participation in the intergovernmental work, as due to their European Union obligations they may prevent the Council of Europe from drawing up new conventions or revising existing conventions, which are important particularly for States that do not belong to the European Union.

19. To enable it to respond to all of these challenges, the Council of Europe must return to real growth. Between 2013 and 2017, member States' contributions to the Ordinary Budget remained stable or, for some countries, decreased. In contrast, Turkey, by deciding to increase its contribution to the budgets of the Council of Europe for the 2016-2017 biennium (Ordinary Budget, Pension Reserve Fund and extraordinary budget) gave the Organisation more breathing space, enabling it to meet certain corporate costs (such as property investment, security, upgrading IT systems, and running intergovernmental and statutory bodies as well as central services).

20. Since the member States' decision to apply zero growth (first in real terms and then in nominal terms) to the Council of Europe's budget, the Assembly has regularly suggested a change to the Financial Regulations so that the unexpended balance from the previous financial year can be made available to the Organisation, and no longer be returned to member States.

21. This request has not been satisfied. However, the Assembly would like to thank those States (20 in 2015) which made unexpended resources from the previous year available to the Organisation to a total amount of €413 000 (28% of the unexpended balance for 2015), which could be reallocated to cover the needs of the European Court of Human Rights and various action plans.

22. To stem the systematic erosion of the Organisation’s resources through inflation (which currently stands at 0.5% in France) and prevent the positive effects of Turkey’s decision to join the major contributors’ club from being erased in the medium term, the Assembly repeats its call for member States to resume real growth in the budget, so as to give the Council of Europe the resources it needs to function properly. In a period of low inflation, and given the current application of the Financial Regulations concerning the use of unexpended balances, a return to real growth does not require an insurmountable effort from the vast majority of member States. Such a decision would be a clear sign of the States’ commitment, with a view to holding a 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of Council of Europe Member States (in 2019).

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr George Loucaides, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. Widening economic and social inequalities in Europe and beyond, as well as increased poverty and social exclusion, provide a breeding ground for populism, extremism, racism, xenophobia and terrorism, undermining the core values and principles of the Council of Europe. To combat these threats and rise to these challenges, we must continue to invest in our democratic, inclusive societies and commit to the defence of human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

2. Policies that harm the social and democratic rights of citizens in Europe are compounded by external challenges such as the migrant and refugee crisis, ongoing hostilities in many parts of the world and the constant threat of terrorism. The Council of Europe must reaffirm its commitment to tackling these issues effectively and finding long-term solutions. But it cannot do so without strengthening its standard-setting capacity, implemented through its network of intergovernmental committees, whose terms of reference could be reviewed to take account of the aforementioned challenges.

3. Is the Council of Europe ready to provide all its member and partner States with the responses enabling them to rise to these challenges and combat the current negative trends?

2. Audit of the 2014 and 2015 accounts

4. Succeeding the French Cour des Comptes, Najwyższa Izba Kontroli (NIK) was appointed as the Council of Europe's external auditor by the Committee of Ministers for a non-renewable five-year term, starting with the audit of the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2014. The audit was carried out in accordance with IPSAS.[3] The financial statements give a true and fair view of the Council of Europe's financial position, operational results and cash flows at 31 December 2014. The external auditor also identified some key areas for improvement:

– risk management, which was introduced across the Organisation in 2014 under the auspices of the Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO). Risk registers have been set up in each Major Administrative Entity. The auditor recommends that this matter be entrusted to a unit with a managerial role, with the DIO continuing to provide support and advice on the preparation and use of the Organisation's strategic risk register;

– the physical inventory, for which the auditors recommend rethinking the basic concept underlying the Council of Europe's practices. Indeed, such inventories are not made in the manner stipulated in the Financial Regulations. To overcome this problem, the auditors recommend establishing a centralised asset management system so as to standardise physical inventory policies, registers, quality accounts, supervision and training. To this end, they suggest that appropriate support in terms of IT hardware and software be given to the teams who carry out the inventory checks;

– accounting for inventories at the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines (EDQM), which should be adapted to comply with IPSAS;

– the introduction of a more automated method for preparing the Council of Europe's financial statements.

5. Regarding the audit for 2015, as well as analysing the Council of Europe's financial statements, the external auditor carried out three performance audits on financial information management, fixed asset management, and the usability and reliability of WebFocus (the financial data processing and reporting application). The auditor also carried out three financial audits concerning three Council of Europe programmes financed with extra-budgetary contributions: the immediate measures package for Ukraine (PIMU); confidence-building measures for the Transnistria region of the Republic of Moldova, and the programme "Strengthening the independence, efficiency and professionalism of the judiciary in Ukraine".

3. International Public Sector Accounting Standards.

3. 2015

6. Combating terrorism was a priority throughout 2015. After the Paris terrorist attacks at the beginning of January 2015, the Ministers' Deputies took several decisions on 21 January concerning the Council of Europe's action to counter the radicalisation that leads to terrorism. In particular, they adopted the mandate of a Committee on Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Related Issues, tasked with preparing a draft additional protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS No. 196). Against this backdrop, the Assembly adopted several resolutions and delivered an opinion on the draft protocol which the Committee of Ministers adopted at its session on 19 May 2015 and which was opened for signature in Riga, Latvia, on 22 October 2015 (CETS No. 217). The Committee of Ministers also approved a statement and an action plan on countering violent extremism and the radicalisation that leads to terrorism, aimed at preventing and combating radicalisation through concrete measures in the public sector, especially in schools and prisons, and online.

7. The democratic security of Ukraine is another important issue that received close attention in 2015. In particular, in January 2015, the Committee of Ministers approved a 2015-2017 action plan to support human rights, rule of law and democracy reforms in Ukraine. Mention should be made here of the Ukrainian President's decision to set up a constitutional commission in which the Council of Europe participates. The challenge is to make speedy progress with reforms on decentralisation, the judicial system, electoral law, anti-corruption measures and human rights protection. The Assembly examined several aspects of the conflict in Ukraine, including human rights angles.

8. With regard to other important events, it can be noted that, on 25 March 2015, the Committee of Ministers opened the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs (CETS No. 216) for signature, following an international conference on the issue in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. On that occasion 14 member States signed the convention. On 11 May 2015, the Committee of Ministers launched a new European Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, celebrated in the Council of Europe's member States on 18 November, and invited all governments, parliamentarians, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and people working with children to take this day on board through concerted action against such crimes.

9. In budgetary matters, the most important news was the Turkish Foreign Minister's announcement, on 6 January 2015, confirming Turkey's commitment to becoming a major contributor in 2016. This was formally approved by the Committee of Ministers in May 2015. This important decision (representing almost €19 million of extra funding, all budgets combined) aims to give the Council of Europe additional resources to fulfil its mandate. Alongside this decision, the Committee of Ministers, responding to Assembly Recommendation 2072 (2015) on the allocation of seats in the Parliamentary Assembly with respect to Turkey, adopted Resolution CM/Res(2015)7 amending Article 26 of the Council of Europe Statute (ETS No. 1) so as to increase the number of Turkish representatives in the Parliamentary Assembly to 18.

10. Lastly, regarding co-operation, it can be noted that the Committee of Ministers decided to approve the implementation of two action and assistance plans for the 2015-2017 period concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, with part-funding through voluntary contributions from member States.

11. In addition to issues linked to terrorism, the Assembly paid particularly close attention to asylum and migration matters in the light of the pressure on European States resulting from the mass influx of refugees. The Assembly also passed an important resolution on the reform of football governance. It elected several judges to the European Court of Human Rights, and re-elected Ms Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni as Deputy Secretary General, and Mr Wojciech Sawicki as Secretary General of the Assembly. Lastly, it awarded its Václav Havel Human Rights Prize to Ms Ludmilla Alexeeva (Russian Federation).

4. 2016

12. At the end of November 2015 the Committee of Ministers adopted the Organisation's third biennial programme and budget (for 2016 and 2017). As for the previous cycles, the budget's preparation took into account member States' wish to apply zero nominal growth. However, Turkey's decision to become a major contributor in 2016 meant the Council of Europe received substantial additional resources, allowing it to increase its investment and operational capacities and consolidate its action.

13. Guaranteeing the continued effectiveness of the system underpinning the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) is a matter of particular concern for the Committee of Ministers, especially the follow-up action in response to the principles laid down in the Interlaken, Izmir, Brighton and Brussels declarations. The efforts made through the implementation of Protocol No. 14 to the Convention (CETS

No. 194) and other measures have brought about a significant reduction in the number of cases pending before the European Court of Human Rights. The Committee of Ministers also endorsed a number of proposals from the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) regarding the authority of the Convention, the Court and its judgments, and the position of the Convention system in the European and international legal order.

14. The Committee of Ministers approved two new action strategies in 2016. The first concerns Internet governance (2016-2019), the aim being to rise to challenges relating to human rights, democracy and the rule of law in a rapidly evolving online environment. The second strategy concerning the rights of the child (2016-2021) was launched at a high-level conference in Sofia on 5 and 6 April 2016, at which the Assembly was represented.

15. In respect of co-operation, and in response to the different challenges facing member States, the Committee of Ministers adopted an array of multi-annual thematic action plans including the action plan to "Strengthen the independence and impartiality of the judiciary" launched in Sofia in April 2016 at a high-level conference of justice ministers, and the action plan on inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019), following the creation of a Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) due to be opened in Berlin. With regard to the fight against terrorism, the Committee of Ministers adopted a specific action plan on transnational organised crime (2016-2020), as well as guidelines for prison and probation services on radicalisation and violent extremism.

16. Among the other decisions adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2016, mention must be made of the adoption of the Council of Europe Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production (revised) (CETS No. 220), which seeks to encourage the development of film co-production at an international level. The opening for signature of the Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events (CETS No. 218), and the opening for ratification, acceptance or approval of the Protocol amending the European Landscape Convention (CETS No. 219), also took place.

17. Still in the field of standard setting, the international reach of the Council of Europe's treaties is to be welcomed, notably with Costa Rica's membership of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and India's application to accede to the Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons (ETS No. 112), as well as Cape Verde's application to accede to the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (ETS No. 108).

18. The migrant crisis and refugee situation in Europe took up much of the Parliamentary Assembly's 2016 session. The President of the Assembly also launched a new initiative with the hash tag #NoHateNoFear, mentioned in thousands of tweets. 2016 was also a busy election year at international level, with the Assembly observing presidential and legislative elections in 11 member and non-member States. Lastly, the Assembly awarded its Václav Havel Human Rights Prize to Ms Nadia Murad, a young Yezidi woman from the north of Iraq.

19. The Assembly's co-operation activities gathered pace in 2016 thanks to the €751 000 in voluntary contributions that it received for all of its work (including €250 000 for action plans in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania). These funds made it possible to hold over 20 themed seminars or parliamentary conferences on top of the regular meetings of parliamentary networks (sexual violence against children, violence against women, and parliamentary alliance against hate). We should take this opportunity to thank the member States and institutions that provide regular support for the Assembly's co-operation activities.

5. Priorities for 2018-2019

20. In his speech to the Assembly on 24 January 2017 entitled "Understanding populism and defending European democracies", the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, identified three priority challenges which the Council of Europe must take up:

– respond to the populist threat, by giving European citizens effective parliaments, vibrant and plural media, courts in which they can trust, a civil society that offers them the means to act, and, what is key, social rights in the fields of employment, health care and education, all within inclusive societies;

– protect the rights of migrants and refugees through action by all Council of Europe bodies. In this connection, it is regrettable that the Council of Europe no longer has an intergovernmental committee responsible for these issues;

– combat terrorism by focusing initiatives on its funding, particularly through trafficking of cultural artefacts, which the Secretary General denounces as a trade in “blood antiquities”.

21. All of our activities must moreover go hand in hand with the creation of a coherent Europe-wide system of human rights protection and reinforced co-operation with member States to combat terrorism, while ensuring that they do not adopt measures which conflict with the principles of the European Convention on Human Rights and the case law of the Court.

22. To provide a response to the challenges mentioned by the Secretary General, the Council of Europe will also have to develop its work in the field of social rights, the aim being to combat ever-widening social and economic inequalities in Europe. The programme of activities of the next biennium must reflect this priority. In this connection, the Council of Europe should support all initiatives aimed at making the European Social Charter the foundation underlying the European Union’s social pillar, so as to help build a more harmonised, social and inclusive Europe.

23. The Council of Europe’s work programme should also build on the Resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, which sets 17 sustainable development goals, at least eight of which are consistent with the Council of Europe’s priorities in the areas of human rights, health care, education, equality and justice.

24. In implementing its action and activities, the Council of Europe can rely on three drivers:

– setting of standards, whether binding or not, and development of good practices (the conventions and their protocols, the recommendations and resolutions adopted by the Committee of Ministers, with the support of the representative bodies – the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities);

– monitoring activities provided for in the conventions (European Court of Human Rights, Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), Group of experts on action against violence against women and domestic violence (GREVIO), European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), European Committee of Social Rights, etc.), ensuring the honouring of the commitments entered into by the States Parties to those conventions;

– co-operation and technical assistance carried out in the field to assist States in need of help in order to incorporate and implement in practice the standards laid down by the Council of Europe.

25. Since taking office in 2009, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe has carried out a whole package of reforms to revitalise the Organisation and give it fresh political impetus. He has made a strategic choice in strengthening technical assistance and treaty-based monitoring. This choice has raised the visibility of the Council of Europe's work in the field, and helped to offset the stagnation of the Ordinary Budget through substantial extra-budgetary resources. This policy has also contributed to the strengthening of ties between the Council of Europe and the European Union.

26. By drawing up specific action plans, the Council of Europe has been able to provide a targeted number of countries, in particular in eastern Europe and South-East Europe, with substantial assistance to enable them to bring themselves into line with the requirements of both the Council of Europe and the European Union. However, the weakness of this strategy lies in the fact that it focuses attention and resources on a limited number of member States. Yet the role of the Council of Europe is to cater for the needs of 47 European States. Fully restoring this role would entail stepping up intergovernmental co-operation, that is to say bringing together the best national experts and asking them to propose concrete solutions to the various challenges facing European States.

27. Technical assistance has certainly been a means of attracting extra-budgetary resources and has – albeit only partially – offset the effects of the zero nominal growth imposed by member States since 2014. However, these extra-budgetary resources have mainly been used to finance expenditure on assistance programmes, and only to a small extent or not at all the Organisation’s corporate needs, namely property investment, security, upgrading IT systems, intergovernmental co-operation and running statutory bodies and central services.

28. Lastly, the standard-setting pillar – the historic heart of the Council of Europe and of intergovernmental co-operation – has taken something of a back seat in relation to assistance programmes. As a result of the fewer financial resources available for intergovernmental co-operation, there has been a reduction in the

number of steering committees (fewer committees with broader terms of reference) and in their meetings (one or two a year). If we want the Council of Europe to be able to put forward concrete policies by means of which member States can rise to current challenges, a reinforcement of this co-operation will have to be envisaged.

29. Between 2013 and 2017, member States' contributions to the Ordinary Budget remained stable or, for some countries, decreased. In contrast, Turkey, by deciding to increase its contribution to the budgets of the Council of Europe for the 2016-2017 biennium (Ordinary Budget, Pension Reserve Fund and extraordinary budget), gave the Organisation more breathing space, enabling it to meet certain of the corporate costs referred to above.

30. Since the member States' decision to apply zero growth (first in real terms and then in nominal terms) to the Council of Europe's budget, the Assembly has regularly suggested a change to the Financial Regulations so that the unexpended balance from the previous financial year can be made available to the Organisation, and no longer be returned to member States. This request has not been granted, but some States (20 in 2015) have nonetheless made all or part of their share of the unexpended balances available to the Council of Europe, thus allowing the Secretary General to reallocate them to the needs of the European Court of Human Rights and the financing of various action plans.

31. So as to once again give the Council of Europe the means to function properly, and with a view to holding a 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of Council of Europe Member States (in 2019), member States should be able to revert to real budget growth. In a period of low inflation, and given the current application of the Financial Regulations concerning the use of unexpended balances, a return to real growth does not require an insurmountable effort from the vast majority of member States.