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Budgets and priorities of the Council of Europe for the period 2022-2025

Report¹

Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs

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Summary

At a time when Europe is facing the multiple and complex consequences of the health and socio-economic crisis inherited from the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council of Europe intends to prove the Organisation's added value for its member States around a new strategic framework defining the priorities and concrete achievements expected for the next four years. This approach aims to match the activities envisaged with the objectives set and should enable the Council of Europe to demonstrate its usefulness and effectiveness by ensuring that the actions undertaken have a real impact.

The implementation of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe's four-year strategic framework, as well as the organisational reforms under way, including the new human resources strategy, should convince the member States to honour their financial commitments, and even to strengthen them, as the Assembly invites them to do.

1. Reference to committee: Bureau decision, Reference 4571 of 19 March 2021.



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A. Draft opinion²

1. The Parliamentary Assembly's Opinion on the budget and priorities of the Council of Europe for the 2022-2025 quadrennial cycle is taking place in a particular context, when Europe and the world have been facing for more than a year the Covid-19 pandemic and are plunged into the uncertainty linked to the multiple and complex consequences of an unprecedented health and socio-economic crisis. For the Council of Europe, the year 2020 has been an opportune time for in-depth reflection and for proving the Organisation's added value for member States.
2. The Assembly welcomes the elaboration by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Marija Pejčinović Burić, of a new strategic framework, defining the priorities and concrete achievements expected for the next four years. It recalls that it formulated the idea of long-term planning in its [Recommendation 1812 \(2007\)](#) "Political dimension of the Council of Europe budget" and in its [Opinion 272 \(2009\)](#) "Budgets of the Council of Europe for the financial year 2010", already recommending that the Committee of Ministers adopt a multi-annual budgetary framework.
3. The Assembly is convinced that this new perspective of programming and prioritising activities over a four-year period, together with the implementation of a digital modernisation plan, will enable the Council of Europe to continue to respond to the needs of member States while maintaining what has been its strength for more than 70 years: its adaptability and flexibility in order to guarantee the cohesion, continuity, stability, transparency and predictability of its activities for the benefit of member States and their citizens.
4. The Assembly considers, however, that modern technologies, which have been widely used for videoconferencing or teleworking over the past year and have allowed for continuation of the Organisation's core activities and greater flexibility, must be complementary to the working methods used until now. It is important for the Council of Europe to continue to base the conduct of its activities on face-to-face meetings, which allow for rich and often fruitful exchanges, essential for the efficiency of a multilateral organisation.
5. With regard to the guidelines set out in the Council of Europe's strategic framework, the Assembly refers to its [Resolution 2369 \(2021\)](#) and [Recommendation 2199 \(2021\)](#) "The Assembly's vision of the strategic priorities of the Council of Europe", adopted at its April 2021 part-session, which set out its positions on the priority issues it considers to be of strategic importance to the Organisation. The Covid-19 pandemic means that we must be prepared for social challenges and a difficult future for the people of Europe, which will undoubtedly require greater attention from the Council of Europe and its Assembly to ensure that the economic rights and social protection of Europeans are guaranteed.
6. The Council of Europe has demonstrated its relevance during the pandemic, as illustrated by the Secretary General's toolkit for member States "Respecting democracy, rule of law and human rights in the framework of the Covid-19 sanitary crisis". The Assembly has adopted several texts providing guidance on a large variety of issues. Several protective measures have been taken by the authorities and the Assembly has especially underlined the need to ensure that they do not undermine the fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The Assembly has in particular drawn attention to the increased incidents of violence against women and domestic violence during confinement.
7. Analysing the budgetary challenge of the next 2022-2023 biennium, the Assembly recognises that the current health crisis, which has shaken the budgetary balances of member States, could make it more difficult to adapt financial resources to the level of the stated ambitions. Nevertheless, its [Resolution 2369 \(2021\)](#) "The Assembly's vision on the strategic priorities for the Council of Europe" is a strong appeal to the governments of the member States to guarantee the Organisation's sustainability and ensure its financial viability, so that it retains its full effectiveness and political relevance in a global context which makes it more indispensable than ever.
8. The Assembly welcomes the commitment of member States to a "zero real growth" policy for the current biennium while underlying that, in concrete and practical terms, this does not mean a "growth". It reaffirms its long-standing position that member States should resolutely invest more in democratic security as embodied by the Council of Europe, and therefore ensure better funding for it by supporting a real growth budget.

2. Draft opinion adopted by the Committee on 21 April 2021.

9. Furthermore, the Assembly, referring to the decision adopted by the Committee of Ministers at its 129th Session (Helsinki, 17 May 2019) on “A shared responsibility for democratic security in Europe – Ensuring respect for rights and obligations, principles, standards and values”, calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Russian Federation to seek the basis for a mutually acceptable agreement enabling the latter to settle the interests due to the Council of Europe.

10. The Assembly is also aware that, in order to meet their financial commitments, member States need to obtain tangible results from the Organisation. This will be enhanced not only by the four-year Strategic Framework of the Secretary General, but will be complemented also by the ongoing organisational reforms, of which the new human resources strategy is an integral part and which aims to ensure that staff have the skills, motivation and high performance to achieve the objectives set for the four-year cycle, conducive to enhancing the credibility of the Organisation.

11. The Assembly hopes that this ambitious reform in the field of human resources will be carried out in full consultation with the Organisation's staff, whose support is essential to its success. Recalling its [Opinion 297 \(2019\)](#) “Budget and priorities of the Council of Europe for the biennium 2020-2021”, it expects the Council of Europe to put in place a staff policy that is sufficiently attractive to retain good candidates by also offering them career development prospects.

12. The alarming situation of the Pension Reserve Fund is another challenge for the next biennium 2022-2023. The Pension Reserve Fund, established in 2003, aims to stabilise member States' contributions over the medium to long term so that they can meet their obligations under the various Council of Europe pension schemes. However, the Reserve Fund system, which was underfunded when it was set up, has to absorb the retirement of large age groups and cope with the increase in life expectancy of retired staff. Its sustainability requires higher contributions from the States, as active staff have already borne a sharp increase in their own contributions in 2020.

13. In order to ensure that member States meet their obligations and to avoid an excessive impact on their contributions, the Assembly had suggested to the Committee of Ministers, in its [Recommendation 2124 \(2018\)](#) “Modification of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure: the impact of the budgetary crisis on the list of working languages of the Assembly”, several decisions of a budgetary and financial nature, in particular the setting up of a compulsory reserve account financed by all or a substantial part of the unspent balance identified at the closing of each financial year or budget cycle. In view of the situation, the Assembly reiterates its request and hopes that this recommendation will be duly taken into consideration.

14. The Assembly notes with interest the implementation in the Council of Europe of a results-based approach, which is one of the central points of the strategic framework by the Secretary General. This approach aims to match the actions envisaged with the objectives set and should enable the Organisation to ensure that the actions undertaken contribute to solving the problems identified. Indicators will be put in place to assess the progress of the expected results. The Assembly believes that such an approach should enable the Council of Europe to demonstrate its usefulness and effectiveness and ensure that its work has a real impact. However, it considers that the visibility of the Organisation's activities can only be improved by improving its communication policy.

15. Finally, the Assembly asks that the work to modernise the Chamber of the Palais de l'Europe, which was foreseen in the Capital Master Plan and which was postponed indefinitely because of the 2017-2018 budgetary crisis and then the Covid-19 pandemic, to be undertaken rapidly, as planned, and completed before the Assembly sits there in full again.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Tiny Kox, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. The Parliamentary Assembly's Opinion on the budget and priorities of the Council of Europe for the biennium 2022-2025 quadrennial cycle is taking place in a particular context, when Europe and the world have been facing for more than a year the Covid-19 pandemic and are plunged into the uncertainty linked to the multiple and complex consequences of an unprecedented health and socio-economic crisis. For the Council of Europe, the year 2020 has been an opportune time for in-depth reflection and for proving the Organisation's added value for member States.

2. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Marija Pejčinović Burić has proposed to the Organisation to move to four-year programming instead of biennial planning. The idea of multi-annual planning is not new in itself. The Assembly already advocated years ago that the Council of Europe should plan its work on a longer-term basis than annual budgets (see, *inter alia*, paragraph 19 of [Opinion 272 \(2009\)](#) "Budgets of the Council of Europe for the financial year 2010"). The first step was taken with the introduction by the Committee of Ministers of two-year planning more than ten years ago. The proposed four-year planning could be a welcome second step.

3. As the Committee of Ministers prepares to discuss and set the Council of Europe's strategic priorities for the coming years, the Assembly has adopted at its April 2021 part-session [Recommendation 2199 \(2021\)](#) to the Committee of Ministers, on the basis of [Resolution 2369 \(2021\)](#) "The Assembly's vision on the strategic priorities for the Council of Europe". This report will not repeat the ideas and avenues for reflection contained in that Resolution and will focus on the programmatic, budgetary and reform aspects envisaged for the next four-year cycle 2022-2025.

4. It should be recalled that multi-annual planning must go hand in hand with securing the Organisation's budget for the period concerned. In this context, the Assembly should support the Secretary General in ensuring that the budgets for the next four years are established on the basis of real growth (or at least zero real growth – that is limited to the level of inflation). The fact that the Organisation has finally – after years of uncertainty – found a way out of the dispute with one of its largest member States over its financial obligations has brought more stability to the financial perspectives and to the plans and projects of the Organisation. Nevertheless, there is still a need to constantly monitor how our financial means are used for maximum efficiency.

2. Audit of the 2018 and 2019 accounts

5. The audit of the accounts for the 2018-2019 biennium was carried out by Najwyższa Izba Kontroli (NIK-Poland), external auditor of the Council of Europe, which examined the consolidated financial statements of the Council of Europe, for the year ended 31 December 2018, and by the Cour des Comptes (France), new external auditor of the Council of Europe since 1 January 2019, which examined the consolidated financial statements for the year 2019. In both cases, the external auditors gave an unqualified and unmodified opinion for both years. The financial statements present fairly the financial position of the Council of Europe and the results of its operations and its cash flows at the year end.

6. During its audit of the 2018 accounts, the external auditor carried out two performance audits in the areas of human resources policies and on IT strategy, for which a number of recommendations were made. For the audit of the 2019 financial statements, the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated a teleworking arrangement between the external auditor's team and the Council of Europe's financial management and accounting staff. Nevertheless, checks on the stocks of publications of the Directorate of Communication and the stocks of finished products and raw materials of the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines and Healthcare (EDQM) and on the inventory of fixed assets had been carried out at headquarters in June 2020.

7. During this period, receivables related to contributions increased from €59 million at the end of 2018 (relating to the failure of the Russian Federation to pay for two years in a row) to €9 million at the end of 2019, mainly due to the resumption of payment of contributions from the Russian Federation. It should also be recalled that the default interest related to the late payment of the Russian Federation's contributions, namely €8.8 million, has not been settled.

8. The auditors also looked at the item on staff benefits (namely the consideration given for services rendered by staff, that is all Council of Europe pension schemes and medical coverage). These benefits amounted to €3 207 million as at 31 December 2018 and €3 940 million as at 31 December 2019, an increase of €733 million (see also paragraphs 30 et seq. below).

3. 2019

9. In his report prepared for the 129th Session of the Committee of Ministers held in Helsinki on 16-17 May “Facing future challenges – strengthening the Council of Europe”, the then Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland, alerted member States to the growing threats to the rule of law and the new human rights challenges on our continent, stressing the need to strengthen Council of Europe instruments, not to replace or duplicate them elsewhere. Humanity was facing new challenges for which the legal standards of the Council of Europe were required. He identified several major challenges: artificial intelligence and the risks it posed to human rights, democracy and the rule of law; trafficking in human beings; freedom of expression; inequality and discrimination; migration; social rights; combating violence against women and domestic violence.

10. At this ministerial session, the Committee of Ministers also reaffirmed the importance of social rights across the continent and invited those member States that had not yet done so to sign and/or ratify the revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163) and its Additional Protocol providing for a system of collective complaints (ETS No. 158). The Committee of Ministers also decided to examine the feasibility and potential elements of a legal framework for the development, design and application of artificial intelligence. In September 2019, the Committee of Ministers adopted the terms of reference of the Ad hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAHA).

11. The year 2019 was marked by the election of a new Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Marija Pejčinović Burić, in June, as well as by the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe in October, in the presence of the President of the French Republic. In terms of budget, the settlement by the Russian Federation of its compulsory contributions for 2019 as well as those due for the years 2017 and 2018 had narrowly avoided the implementation of a contingency plan that would have been painful for the entire Organisation and provided for 250 job cuts. 2019 was also the occasion to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Eurimages Fund and the 20th anniversary of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO); it should be noted that the Committee of Ministers accepted the European Union's request to obtain observer status with this body.

12. Several important conferences took place in 2019: the Conference of Ministers of Justice, focusing on the challenges of digital justice; Octopus on cybercrime; the HELP Network conference on the training of judges, lawyers and other legal professionals on the proper application of the European Convention on Human Rights; and for the first time a Conference of Heads of Supreme Courts of the Council of Europe member States. With particular regard to legal co-operation, the Committee of Ministers accepted requests from Brazil and Burkina Faso to be invited to accede to the Convention on Cybercrime (ETS No. 185) and the request from Mongolia to be invited to accede to the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters (ETS No. 30).

13. For its part, the Assembly chose to focus its work this year on the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030. In particular, it raised awareness of the importance for parliamentarians, as legislators, to participate in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which was also one of the major themes of the European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments that it organised in Strasbourg on 24 and 25 October 2019, bringing together 450 participants, including more than 60 speakers of parliaments and presidents of international assemblies. The Assembly also awarded its seventh Václav Havel Human Rights Prize jointly to the imprisoned Uighur intellectual Ilham Tohti and to the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR), which brings together young people from all over the Balkans to promote reconciliation.

4. 2020

14. The year 2020 could have started under the best of auspices with the arrival of a new Secretary General, the payment by the Russian Federation of its due contributions and the return of a zero growth budget in real terms (taking into account inflation). Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic that spread in March 2020 has completely changed the parameters and plunged the world into a health crisis unprecedented since the First World War.

15. After the first part-session, the Covid-19 pandemic made it impossible for the Assembly to continue its work as usual and the April, June and October part-sessions could not be held. New working methods had to be invented and implemented, thus allowing, in a first step, the Assembly committees, the Bureau and the Standing Committee to hold their meetings remotely and, in a second step, to organise the Assembly's part-sessions in hybrid mode, as from January 2021.

16. Thanks to videoconferencing technology (and in particular the contract with the KUDO platform, which provides interpretation in five languages), the Assembly was able to continue to operate effectively in 2020 and to overcome – as far as possible – the many restrictions on its members' travel.

17. The part-sessions that could not be organised were replaced by remote meetings of the Standing Committee. In June 2020, the Standing Committee held an exchange of views on the Covid-19 pandemic with the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Mr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. At the October 2020 Enlarged Standing Committee, debates were held on the impact of Covid-19 on democracies, human rights and the rule of law; on migrants and refugees; and on the challenges of artificial intelligence. The Assembly has been able to highlight the consequences of this health crisis and has provided the Committee of Ministers and the member States with a wide range of analyses, proposals and guidelines, affirming its role as the political driving force of the Council of Europe.

18. At its 130th Ministerial Session held by video conference from Athens in November 2020, the Committee of Ministers adopted a Declaration of the Greek Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, also known as the "Athens Declaration", which reflects the commitment of member States to respect the principles guaranteeing human rights, democracy and the rule of law in times of pandemic. This declaration was also endorsed by the Standing Committee. This ministerial session was also the occasion for a ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights. Furthermore, on the European Day for the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, on 12 November 2020, a joint statement by the Secretary General, the incoming and outgoing Presidencies of the Committee of Ministers and the President of the Assembly was issued.

19. Other activities included a high-level conference on environmental protection and human rights in February 2020 and the adoption of a Declaration on human rights and the environment by the Georgian, Greek and German Presidencies of the Committee of Ministers. An online conference of Ministers of Justice, chaired by the Greek Minister of Justice, took place in November 2020 on "independence of justice and the rule of law". The conclusions underlined the importance of co-operation and mutual trust between Council of Europe member States in overcoming the health crisis and defending common values as well as the efficiency of the judicial system as a prerequisite for the enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. In the field of education, it is worth noting the creation by 17 member States of an Observatory on history teaching in Europe in the form of an enlarged partial agreement (that is open to non-member States of the Council of Europe).

20. Finally, due to the non-holding of the June and October 2020 part-sessions, the Committee of Ministers decided, in these exceptional circumstances, to extend the term of office of the current Deputy Secretary General, Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, until the end of the month following the election of her successor and that of the Secretary General of the Assembly, Wojciech Sawicki, until 28 February 2021. These elections took place by remote electronic voting during the January 2021 part-session, held in a hybrid format (video conference and face-to-face).

5. Priorities for 2022-2025

21. In line with her commitments, the Secretary General, Marija Pejčinović Burić, has finalised a comprehensive reflection on the Council of Europe's mission and, to this end, elaborated a new strategic framework reflecting the Organisation's priorities for the next four years 2022-2025. The particularity of the four-year plan presented by the Secretary General is to recall not only the main priorities but also the concrete achievements ("deliverables") and other actions and measures to achieve these objectives.

22. This strategic framework should also be read in the light of the efforts made and to be made by the Council of Europe to modernise its working tools and operations through the Strategic IT Action Plan 2018-2021 and, above all, the digital strategy decided by the Committee of Ministers at the end of 2020. This will make it possible to strengthen the Organisation's capacity to maintain its activities in the event of a crisis, by developing a whole catalogue of new services in the field of meetings with remote participation (videoconferencing with interpretation, hybrid meetings, electronic voting, online seminars).

23. This new perspective on the programming and organisation of activities over a four-year period and the adaptation of the terms of reference and working methods of the various intergovernmental committees and other subordinate bodies will enable the Council of Europe to continue to respond to the needs of member States while maintaining what has been its strength for over 70 years, namely its adaptability and flexibility in meeting the challenges Europe is constantly facing. With a four-year strategic framework, the Council of Europe is taking a further step to ensure the cohesion, continuity, stability, transparency and predictability of its activities for the benefit of member States and their citizens.

24. It is clear, however, that modern videoconferencing and teleworking technologies should be seen as a complement to allow for greater flexibility. It is indeed important that the Council of Europe continues to base its work on face-to-face meetings which allow for the rich and often fruitful exchanges which are essential to the mission of a multilateral organisation.

25. With regard to the strategic choices presented by the Secretary General, it is not my intention to react on the main priorities as she has defined them in her document on the strategic framework of the Council of Europe. I refer to the report of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy ([Doc. 15252 “The Assembly’s vision on the strategic priorities for the Council of Europe”](#)) and more particularly to [Resolution 2369 \(2021\)](#). However, in order to meet the challenges reflected in the strategic priorities, the Council of Europe needs financial means commensurate with the ambitious programme of activities proposed.

26. These priorities include two important objectives – finding ways to enhance synergy between the different monitoring mechanisms and their cohesion, and strengthening intergovernmental co-operation – for which the Assembly advocated, *inter alia*, in its [Recommendation 2114 \(2017\)](#) “Defending the acquis of the Council of Europe: preserving 65 years of successful intergovernmental co-operation”, calling on the Committee of Ministers and the then Secretary General to strengthen intergovernmental activities and its convention-based system. On the question of monitoring, the Assembly committed itself to strengthening its action in the dynamic triangle of standard-setting, monitoring and implementation activities by promoting synergies between its monitoring procedure and those of other Council of Europe bodies.

27. In this context of enhanced co-operation, the decision of the Turkish authorities to withdraw from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, the “Istanbul Convention”) at a time when violence against women is exploding in many countries, due to the health crisis we are experiencing, is bitterly regretted. Similarly, we must be prepared for social challenges and a difficult future for Europe’s populations as a result of the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, which will undoubtedly require greater attention from the Council of Europe and its Assembly to ensure that the economic rights and social protection of Europeans continue to be guaranteed.

28. With the current health crisis having shaken the budgetary balances of member States, obtaining resources commensurate with the stated ambitions will be difficult. However, the minimum that member States must ensure for the two biennial budgets of 2022-2023 and 2024-2025 is that budgetary resources are maintained at their current level in real terms (that is taking account of inflation). The estimated inflation rate for 2022 is 0.4%, representing an overall increase in member States’ contributions of €1 million compared to 2021, and the inflation rate for 2023 is expected to be 1.5%, representing an increase in member States’ contributions of €2.8 million compared to 2022.

29. In order to meet their financial commitments, member States need to obtain tangible results from the Secretary General on the organisational reforms underway in the Council of Europe through the implementation of a human resources strategy, the aim of which is to ensure that staff have the skills, motivation and high performance to achieve the objectives set for the next four-year cycle. However, care must be taken to ensure that this reform is undertaken with staff and not against them. Ambitious reform in the field of human resources is never easy. That is why the support of the staff for a major reform such as the one envisaged is essential.

30. In this context, the proposal to strengthen the implementation of a results-based approach in the Council of Europe, which is one of the central points of the strategic framework, is to be welcomed. The aim is to ensure and demonstrate that the action envisaged will contribute to the achievement of the objective set. The Organisation has therefore adopted a three-level results approach: immediate outcomes (or expected results), intermediate outcomes (expected changes in a target group) and impact (long-term change). This approach should enable the Organisation to structure its intervention by ensuring that the actions undertaken contribute to solving the problems identified. Indicators will be put in place to assess whether the expected results have been achieved. This approach should enable the Council of Europe to demonstrate its usefulness and effectiveness and to ensure that its work has an effective impact. But the Council of Europe still needs to improve its communication policy to ensure that its work is truly visible.

31. The other important staff-related issue concerns the Pension Reserve Fund. Established in January 2003, the main purpose of this fund is to stabilise member States' contributions over the medium to long term, so that they can meet their obligations under the various Council of Europe pension schemes. The situation is alarming in this regard.

32. The Council of Europe currently has three pension schemes for its staff: the coordinated pension scheme introduced in 1974 and in force until the end of 2002; the new pension scheme (NRP), in force between 2003 and 31 March 2013 (which concerns staff recruited during that period); and the third pension scheme (TRP), opened on 1 April 2013 and still in force. While the two new schemes are self-financing, this is not the case for the first coordinated scheme, which has a significant debt due to the non-payment of States' contributions for almost 30 years.

33. It should also be noted that in 2019, a substantial change was made to the first pension scheme (coordinated scheme). It was decided that from 1 January 2020, the benefits paid to pensioners would be indexed to the rate of inflation instead of the rate of increase in wages. This change resulted in a €97 million decrease in the staff benefits liability.

34. The Council of Europe faces two problems with regard to pensions.

- The first is linked to a historical situation: for 30 years (from 1974 to 2003), only staff members contributed to the pension budget, while the member States only contributed on an ad hoc basis, to the extent necessary to enable the payment of pensions. This means that no contributions were capitalised during the period and that no investment income was obtained. It should also be recalled that earlier, the then member States had decided in 1974 to liquidate the previous Pension Fund and distribute the savings among themselves, rather than maintaining an interest-bearing system, a capital that was sorely lacking later on.
- The second is that the Pension Reserve Fund was deliberately underfunded when it was set up. Member States' contributions are determined on the basis of actuarial studies carried out every four years. However, an interim actuarial study prepared in the summer of 2019 concluded that an increase in member States' contributions would be necessary from 2022 onwards to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Reserve Fund, due, among other things, to the mortality table (the increase in life expectancy) of staff of international organisations based in Europe and thus of Council of Europe pensioners. The study concludes that member States should increase their contributions to this fund by €6 million to ensure its sustainability.

35. A number of measures have already been taken, including a significant increase in staff contributions (staff contributions increased in January 2020 from 13% to 25% depending on the scheme to which they belong).

36. The other major reform to be implemented is that of digital modernisation, the aim of which is to give the Council of Europe and its organs the tools to make better use of modern means of communication and to facilitate remote meetings where possible and desirable. These are major investments that will have to be made in the next budgetary year 2022-2023.

37. This should not overshadow the other priority, which is the renovation of the Chamber. This was foreseen in the Capital Master Plan for the years 2017-2018 but had to be delayed, first because of the Russian Federation's failure to pay its budgetary contribution and then because of the health situation in 2020. Work could resume at the end of 2022 for a period of one year, which would prevent the Assembly from being able to sit in the Chamber during that time. Alternative solutions will be studied by the Council of Europe's technical services and high-level contacts will have to be resumed with the European Parliament to study the possibilities of using their hemicycle. In 2017, the European Parliament agreed in principle to a lump sum payment of €240 000.

38. With regard to the budgetary framework in particular, the principle retained is the maintenance of two biennial budgets, for 2022-2023 and 2024-2025 respectively, with an approval of the programme of activities for the next four years, the first biennial budget for 2022-2023 and the budgetary perspectives for the second biennial budget for 2024-2025. A mid-term review of the programme will be carried out in the summer of 2023, on the basis of which the draft budget for 2024-2025 will be reviewed and adjusted. The adoption of the budget for the years 2024-2025 will only take place in the last quarter of 2023.

39. Since the Committee of Ministers will not adopt a budget for the Council of Europe for the next four years at the end of 2021, but only the budget for 2022-2023, the Assembly will have to prepare a new report in the first half of 2023 on the biennial budget for 2024 and 2025 and on its own expenditure for that period.