Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2501 (2023)[1]

Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly for the biennium 2024-2025

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In accordance with Committee of Ministers Resolution (53) 38 on the budgetary system of the Consultative Assembly, and in line with Article 20 of the Financial Regulations of the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly issues an opinion on its expenditure on a biannual basis. The sums allocated to the Assembly from the ordinary budget of the Council of Europe cover staff and operating costs, including those of the political groups. Since 2010, the Assembly has presented its opinion concerning its own expenses in the form of a resolution. This Resolution has been drafted within the framework of the 2024-2027 programme and quadrennial budget cycle and covers the Assembly's priorities and expenditure needs during the period from 2024 to 2025.

2. The war of aggression launched on 24 February 2022 by the Russian Federation against Ukraine led to the expulsion of the Russian Federation from the Organisation on the grounds of a serious violation of the Statute of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 1). This has had an impact on the activities of the Council of Europe, including the Assembly.

3. In terms of budgetary consequences, the expulsion of a major contributor member State required the remaining 46 member States to fill the gap in the 2022-2023 budget and to reallocate available funding to priority activities, in particular those in support of Ukraine, including within the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine "Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction" (2023-2026).

4. In terms of political consequences, the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe highlighted, in the Reykjavik Declaration and its appendices, the adjustment in political direction and priorities of the Council of Europe's work. The Assembly expressed support for these in Opinion 301 (2023) "Budgets and priorities of the Council of Europe for the period 2024-2027".

5. Building upon the outcomes of the 4th Summit, during the 2024-2025 biennium, the Assembly will continue to play its role as the largest European multilateral political parliamentary platform for debating current challenges and emerging issues regarding human rights, democracy and the rule of law. These values and principles are facing challenges on the European continent and beyond, not least in relation to the war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The Assembly will continue to provide support to Ukraine, including through interparliamentary co-operation, and to address the political, legal and human rights consequences of the war, as well as to ensure accountability.

6. Moreover, the Assembly will focus on parliamentary co-operation and provision of support to member States and their parliaments in delivering on a number of key priorities identified in the Reykjavik Declaration. Notably, these priorities will include supporting the implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights; securing accountability and preventing impunity for the crime of aggression and war crimes, crimes against humanity and grave human rights violations committed during the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine; counteracting democratic backsliding and providing early warning and rapid response; and

1. *Assembly debate* on 21 June 2023 (17th sitting) (see Doc. 15781, report of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, rapporteur: Ms Ingjerd Schou). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 21 June 2023 (17th sitting).

addressing a new generation of rights, including those regarding the environment and the use of artificial intelligence and emerging digital technologies. The Assembly's specific contribution to delivering on the objectives defined at the 4th Summit is outlined in the appendix to this Resolution.

7. Furthermore, during the 2024-2025 biennium, the Assembly will continue to promote the ratification and domestic implementation of key Council of Europe legal instruments by Council of Europe member States and States that have geographical and political proximity to the Organisation. Notably, it will contribute to the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals through parliamentary involvement and co-operation.

8. Fulfilling its statutory role, the Assembly will ensure the election of judges to the European Court of Human Rights and of senior officials in the Council of Europe, in accordance with the election schedule, and will review membership applications transmitted by the Committee of Ministers.

9. The Assembly's contribution to the implementation of the 4th Summit's outcomes and provision of enhanced support to Council of Europe member States, in particular Ukraine, in addressing the consequences of the ongoing war, would require structural reinforcement of the Assembly's Secretariat, as described in the appendix to this Resolution. The Assembly expects due consideration to be given to these proposals.

10. At the same time, during the period from 2024 to 2025, the Assembly will continue its modernisation efforts with a view to, *inter alia* simplifying and improving the accessibility of its working tools and optimising expenditure regarding, in particular, document production and printing, with the aim of transitioning to a fully paperless operation, thus reducing the carbon footprint of the Assembly and contributing to the Organisation's overall environmental effort.

11. Similarly, the Assembly welcomes the launch, in February 2023, of the long-awaited renovation of the Assembly Chamber, scheduled to be completed in 2024. The renovation works are expected to modernise the Chamber's equipment (including information technology, multimedia and the voting system) and to upgrade it in line with modern safety, security and accessibility standards. The Assembly looks forward to the timely completion of the works.

12. In 2024 and 2025, the Assembly budget should continue to contribute to the viable functioning of political groups. The political groups are facing increasing financial pressure, especially relating to rising staff costs due to inflation and increases in travel costs. This affects the entire Organisation, not least because of the current economic situation and the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. While the Assembly will continue to cover the interpretation costs of the political groups' statutory meetings during part-sessions, it believes that it would be timely and appropriate to increase the overall allocation to the groups, so as to give them more flexibility to organise their activities.

13. Lastly, the Assembly reiterates its view that the sustainability of the Council of Europe's activities and the full and effective implementation of the outcomes of the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe require strengthening the Council of Europe's financial base. It believes that member States' financial contribution to the Organisation should match their political ambition, as expressed in the Reykjavik Declaration. In this context, the Assembly will work closely with the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General to achieve this goal, relying on the support of the parliaments of the Council of Europe's 46 member States.

Appendix - Expenditure needs of the Parliamentary Assembly

Staff expenditure

1. The budget of the Parliamentary Assembly covers basic salaries, allowances (both non-recurrent and periodical) and social insurance for staff of the Secretariat of the Assembly. The information given is based on the present structure of the Assembly composed of nine committees.

2. The entry into force, on 1 January 2023, of the new Staff Regulations of the Council of Europe has made it possible to stabilise the jobs of staff currently employed on precarious short-term contracts, thus optimising the Assembly's structures and staff resources. Ongoing processes of selection and appointment of staff will be finalised on 1 July 2023.

3. Thus, on 1 July 2023, the Assembly Secretariat will count 84 posts (including three A-grade national secondments) and one specially appointed official (Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly). Overall, there will be 49 A-grade jobs and 35 B-grade jobs.

4. The Assembly Secretariat is organised around two directorates, namely Democracy and the Rule Law (Directorate 1) and Human Dignity and Sustainable Development (Directorate 2), the Table Office, the Information Technologies and Events Department and the Administration and Central Services Department.

5. Directorate 1 provides secretariat services to five general committees and the Election Observation and Support Division. Directorate 2 includes the secretariats of four general committees and the Inter-Parliamentary Co-operation and Parliamentary Projects Support Division.

6. The President's Private Office, the Secretary General's Office (which also provides secretariat services to the Bureau of the Assembly and the Joint Committee) and the Communication Division are directly answerable to the Secretary General of the Assembly.

7. The existing structures and staff composition allow the Assembly Secretariat to provide necessary services to its bodies and members and to carry out its regular activities. However, the implementation of additional priorities related, *inter alia*, to addressing the consequences of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, the outcomes of the 4th Summit and fulfilling the Assembly's statutory responsibilities (namely consideration of a membership application transmitted by the Committee of Ministers), would require structural reinforcements. Indeed, three posts of committee secretary (A2/A3 level) and one post of committee assistant (B1/B2 level) would be required. These additional staff resources would be assigned flexibly to priority sectors through a horizontal "task-force" approach in line with the Organisation's People Strategy.

Operational expenditure

8. Thanks to the modernisation efforts, the Assembly has made savings in recent years by rationalising its work to reduce operational expenditure, notably by putting in place remote preparation of verbatim records and by introducing digital tools (PACE-Apps) with the aim of transitioning to a fully paperless operation.

9. That being said, the Assembly Secretariat is facing increasing operational costs, notably relating to travel and accommodation of parliamentarians and staff traveling on Assembly business, as well as increased use of interpretation services during the growing number of members' fact-finding visits. Moreover, additional priorities, as defined at the 4th Summit, and activities relating to the consequences of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine would increase the Assembly's operational expenditure.

10. In this context, a budgetary perspective of zero real growth is only a minimum requirement for ensuring the Assembly's financial stability and viability. An increase in the Assembly's overall budgetary envelope for operational activities would be required in order to ensure the sustainability of the Assembly's activities.

11. The functioning of the Assembly includes the following tasks:

– the holding of the ordinary session, divided into four part-sessions (held in January, April, June and September/October each year);

– the meetings of the Standing Committee, held three times a year between the part-sessions of the Assembly;

– meetings held outside the four part-sessions of the Assembly by each of the nine general committees, sub-committees and ad hoc committees of the Assembly or the Bureau;

– committee and sub-committee meetings held elsewhere than in Strasbourg or Paris;

– conferences, symposiums, seminars and parliamentary hearings;

– activities connected with the Assembly's interparliamentary co-operation programme;

– visits by rapporteurs to prepare reports, including visits to countries under the monitoring procedure or for post-monitoring dialogue;

– election observation;

– modernisation and digitalisation of the Assembly's working methods.

12. Within the framework of its work programme, the Assembly will prioritise the following activities during 2024 and 2025:

– supporting Ukraine's resilience against the Russian Federation's war of aggression, strengthening co-operation with the Verkhovna Rada and raising awareness on the consequences of the war among national parliaments;

– ensuring accountability of the Russian Federation for its actions and addressing the legal, humanitarian and human rights consequences of the war of aggression against Ukraine, including the issue of forcibly deported Ukrainian children to the Russian Federation or temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories;

– contributing to delivering the outcomes of the 4th Summit, notably:

  - upholding democracy and counteracting democratic backsliding, including by promoting the implementation of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy, fostering the participation of young people in democratic processes and mainstreaming the youth dimension in its work;

  - ensuring a parliamentary contribution to the implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and continuing parliamentary efforts to promote ratification and domestic implementation of key Council of Europe conventions, within the Council of Europe geographic area as well as the Organisation's geographical and political proximity;

  - fostering exchange of good practices and developing legal standards and policy guidelines on the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment;

  - raising awareness among national legislators and informing national public policies on the impact of new technologies, especially artificial intelligence, on human rights and the integrity of democratic processes;

  - combating inequalities and discrimination, as well as further enhancing equality between women and men and promoting women's empowerment;

  - strengthening co-operation with the European Parliament, including in the context of the European Union enlargement process, and continuing active collaboration with international partner organisations, in particular the United Nations, including regarding the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals;

  - continuing and further strengthening dialogue with democratic forces and civil society from Belarus and the Russian Federation that respect the values and principles of the Organisation, including the territorial integrity of sovereign member States.

13. Where interparliamentary co-operation is concerned, the Assembly will continue to implement the different assistance and co-operation programmes adapted to the needs of the parliamentary institutions, in close collaboration with its committee secretariats. It is worth noting here that it is currently engaged in a joint co-operation programme with the European Union specifically concerning the Parliament of Morocco (an Assembly partner for democracy), the aim of which is to strengthen its role as a guarantor of parliamentary democracy.

14. During the 2024-2025 period, the Assembly will continue the implementation of its ongoing co-operation projects, notably with the aim of further integrating the parliamentary dimension into the overall co-operation activities of the Council of Europe, including within thematic and horizontal actions plans. Priority projects will focus, *inter alia* on strengthening relations and co-operation with the Ukrainian Parliament; strengthening political dialogue with democratic forces from Belarus; supporting parliamentary networks including Women

Free from Violence, the Network of Contact Parliamentarians for a Healthy Environment, the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance and the Parliamentary Platform for the Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) People in Europe; and supporting the rights of the child and social rights.

15. The Assembly will continue to observe parliamentary and presidential elections in countries under its monitoring procedure, in close collaboration with the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and the Assembly's international partners (the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Parliament) within the framework of international election observation missions.

16. Lastly, the Assembly will continue to support its political groups through their budgetary allowance, calculated on a lump-sum basis for each group for administrative assistance, plus an additional per capita allowance which varies depending on the membership of the group. In the face of increasing costs, notably due to inflation and rising travel costs, the Assembly should consider increasing the overall allocation to political groups in its budget, so as to give them more flexibility to organise activities.