Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Opinion 171 (1993)[1]

Council of Europe general accounts and budgets for the years 1991, 1993 and 1994

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The 1994 Council of Europe budget is being prepared in the context of the further enlargement of the Organisation to include central and eastern European countries (Lithuania, Slovenia and Estonia joined in May 1993 and other states, in particular the Czech and Slovak Republics, will probably become members in the course of 1993).

2. The budget is also being prepared with a view to the Summit of heads of state and government of the Council of Europe member states (Vienna, 8 and 9 October 1993), which could take decisions that have budget implications for the Organisation.

3. The Secretary General, in her proposals, the Assembly, in its requests (opinion on the programme-budget for the operational expenditure of the Assembly in 1994), and the Committee of Ministers, in its budget decisions, must all take these changes into account.4.Consequently,

A.With regard to the Council of Europe general accounts for 1991, the Assembly:

a. is satisfied with the opinion of the Board of Auditors, which certified that the general accounts were accurate and in keeping with the rules, and which stated, in particular, that the budgetary expenditure was in keeping with the purpose and limits of the appropriations, and that the financial management had been conducted with a commendable sense of economy;

b. supports the recommendations of the Board of Auditors and the Secretary General's intentions with regard to the modernisation of financial and staff management, and stronger financial control and hopes that appropriate financial resources will be placed at the Secretary General's disposal;

c. expresses concern about the delays in the payment of contributions by certain member states, which may go so far as to cause the Organisation cash flow problems, and endorses the Secretary General's invitation to member states to abide by the time-limits provided for in the Financial Regulations.

B. With regard to the 1993 budget, the Assembly:

a. is satisfied with the continued real growth of the budgetary resources made available to the Council of Europe (7,57% for the ordinary budget in 1993). For the first time, the total of the Organisation's budgets, including partial agreements, has reached 1 thousand million French francs;

b. is aware of the difficult economic climate and the budgetary restrictions with which member states have to contend, but regrets the fact that the Organisation's budget has not increased as much as in previous years (9,57% in 1992, 11,45% in 1991, after several years' stagnation), even though increasing demands are placed on it, particularly as a result of the new tasks entailed by the Council's opening its doors to central and eastern Europe;

c. welcomes, in particular, the increase in the staff of the Secretariat, in which the number of permanent jobs, although still insufficient, continued to increase, reaching a total of 1096 (1016 in 1992).

1. See Doc. 6849, report of the Committee on the Budget and the Intergovernmental Work Programme, Rapporteur: Mr Alexander. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 5 June 1993.

C. With regard to its own budget for 1993, the Assembly:

a. observes with satisfaction that the increase in Vote III in real terms (7,65%) is not only greater than the increase in 1992 (5,35%) but that, in contrast to last year, it matches the increase in the ordinary budget;

b. also observes that there has been a slight improvement in the budgetary position in respect of Vote III which, in 1993, accounts for 8,11% of the sum total of the appropriations, although it still lags behind both the Court and Commission of Human Rights and the Intergovernmental Programme of Activities;

c. regrets that its requests for staff have been only partially met, with the result that it is unable to use the resources at its disposal as effectively as possible and to organise the secretariat of the Clerk's Office in such a way as to meet its new needs.

D. With regard to the budget prospects for 1994, the Assembly:

a. hopes that the timetable for the new budget procedure laid down by the Committee of Ministers at its 472nd meeting, in March 1992, will be observed, so that it can, in particular, draw up its budget proposals in the light of information provided by the Ministers' Deputies;

b. considers it necessary to continue to increase the budget so as to reach a minimum threshold that will enable the Organisation to meet the new challenges facing it: the enlargement of the Council of Europe, co-operation with the central and eastern European countries, inappropriate human resources and infrastructure, possible extension of the areas of responsibility of the Organisation;

c. recommends that consideration be given, where applicable, to the provision of additional financial resources for certain programmes and activities, such as co-operation with other organisations, contributions from ministries other than foreign affairs ministries and the establishment of foundations;

d. considers it politically essential to continue, and even to step up, the assistance provided to the new democracies so as to provide as much encouragement as possible for the changes taking place;

e. considers that there is an urgent need to adapt the size of the Secretariat staff to the Organisation's increased workload, especially in view of the enlargement of the Organisation and the resulting new activities;

f. requests that efforts be continued to provide the Secretariat with the practical resources it needs, in particular offices and computers;

g. reiterates its requests to the effect that staff management be modernised and social achievements (training, equality between the sexes, legal protection, right of negotiation, etc.) be consolidated and extended;

h. hopes that an information policy in keeping with the aims and new role of the Council of Europe will be adopted at last and implemented with the active co-operation of the member states.