Opinion 225 (2001)[1]

Expenditure of the Assembly for the financial year 2002

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The adoption of Resolution 1220 (2000) on the reform of the Assembly's working methods and its committee structure bore witness to the Assembly's ongoing effort to achieve rationalisation and better use of its limited resources. It is therefore all the more regrettable that the Committee of Ministers did not meet the Assembly's budgetary requests for 2001, as set out in its Opinion No. 219 (2000), in particular as regards its modest staffing proposals. In addition, the principle of zero real budgetary growth, which it is now suggested should again be applied in 2002, offers the prospect of reducing even more seriously its capacity to function efficiently in the medium term and pursue its main political objectives, which are the consolidation of democratic institutions, respect for human rights and freedoms and the rule of law in all member states.

2. The Assembly regards it as essential that the Council of Europe, which is the broadest-based European organisation, should be able fully to perform its role as guarantor of democratic security and stability on the continent, and believes that this mission justifies a weightier financial commitment from its member states.

3. The Assembly encourages the Committee of Ministers to study measures that would make it possible, where necessary, to provide assistance to the most disadvantaged countries whose own financial resources alone do not enable them to play an active part in the work of the Organisation. It therefore does not believe that the Committee of Ministers should use new accessions to reduce further the contributions of states which are already members.

4. The Assembly's total budget estimates for 2002 represent an increase of some 138 500 euros (less than 1%) in real terms over its 2001 appropriations. In view of the modesty of these estimates in comparison with the Council of Europe's general budget, the Assembly is convinced that they can easily be met by the Committee of Ministers. If, however, the eventual appropriations were insufficient, the Assembly would be obliged to present additional budgetary proposals to the Committee of Ministers in 2002, a possibility envisaged in Article 38.d of the Council of Europe Statute.

5. The Assembly agrees that the distribution of its budgetary resources should be more transparent and the members of the Assembly should have greater influence in deciding how the appropriated funds are to be spent.

6. The Assembly, given its major responsibility for completing the enlargement process in the years to come, needs to be given human and financial resources tailored to a future defined by the needs of its enlarging membership and by the goals set by the 2nd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe.

7. Fully sharing the Committee of Ministers' renewed emphasis on the need for a higher profile in the Organisation's work, the Assembly wishes to develop further its interparliamentary co-operation and other external relations, as well as its communication policy, by making the fullest use of new possibilities opened up in the media field through technological developments. This would make the Assembly's activities, public documents and information material more accessible to the general public, governments, parliaments and other institutions.

1. Assembly debate on 23 April 2001 (9th Sitting) (see Doc. 9014, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr von der Esch). Text adopted by the Assembly on 23 April 2001 (9th Sitting).

8. The enlargement process has also greatly affected the functioning of the Assembly's five political groups. In view of the growth in membership of each political group as a result of enlargement, and considering also their increased role in the Assembly's life, their secretarial and financial resources, which have not been raised since 1997, should now be increased in a way that also fully covers the financial deficit so far incurred.

Appendix

Appended to this opinion are:

1. a table of requested increases for 2002 compared with the appropriations for 2001;
2. brief explanations for the proposed changes.

Vote III of the ordinary budget – Expenditure of the Assembly	Appropriations for 2001 Euros	Changes in real terms proposed for 2002 Euros
Head 3.1 – Staff expenses		
Sub-heads		
30101 – Salary, allowances and social charges of the Secretary General of the Assembly	166 800	
30102 – Remuneration of staff recruited on established posts	6 311 500	
30103 – Recruitment, arrival and departure expenses – Home leave	61 000	
30104 – Overtime – statutory and other allowances	21 300	
30105 – Remuneration and accessory charges of temporary staff	1 502 200	35 000
30106 – Provision for adjustment to remuneration	p.m.	
30107 – Secondment of national civil servants to the Assembly	61 000	
Total head 3.1	8 123 800	35 000
Head 3.2 – Allocation to the Assembly's political groups		
30201 – Allocation to the Assembly's political groups	614 400	53 500
Total Head 3.2	614 400	53 500
Head 3.3 – Supplies, services and other operational expenditure		
Sub-heads		
30301 – Publishing and printing	990 400	
30302 – Interpretation	1 848 700	
30303 – Translation	1 028 200	
30304 – Official expenses of the President of the Assembly	84 500	
30305 – Expenditure pertaining to the Private Office of the President of the Assembly	78 900	
30306 – Representational expenditure, other official expenditure and travelling expenses of members of the Assembly	205 100	
30307 – Official journeys	268 300	
30308 – Expenses for inviting guests of the Parliamentary Assembly	189 900	
30309 – Consultation of experts	76 200	
30310 – Organisation of ad hoc conferences	137 200	
30311 – Grant to the International Institute for Democracy	38 100	
30312 – Other expenditure not specifically provided for in this vote	50 300	50 000
30313 – Modernisation of the Assembly's equipment	p.m.	

Vote III of the ordinary budget – Expenditure of the Assembly	Appropriations for 2001 Euros	Changes in real terms proposed for 2002 Euros
30314 – European prizes	61 000	
30315 – Operating and maintenance costs of the electronic voting system	36 300	
30316 – Co-operation and monitoring programme	762 200	
Total Head 3.3	5 855 300	50 000
Total Vote III	14 593 500	138 500

Vote III – Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly

Head 3.1 – Staff

Sub-head 30101 – Salary, allowances and social charges of the Secretary General of the Assembly

The 2002 appropriations under this sub-head should be maintained at the same level in real terms as in 2001.

Sub-head 30102 – Remuneration of staff recruited on established posts

This appropriation covers the basic salaries, allowances (both non-recurring and periodic) and social insurance of the permanent staff of the Secretariat of the Assembly, which comprises seventy-five posts.

Following the adoption of its Resolution 1220 (2000) on the reform of the Assembly's working methods and committee structure, the Assembly in January 2001 completed its reform process, thereby modifying both its internal functioning and the structure of its Secretariat. The restructuring has increased the tasks and responsibilities of several staff members of the Secretariat, as a result of wider terms of reference of the new Assembly committees they serve. Against this background the rapporteur believes it would be sensible to harmonise the internal administrative structure and to upgrade the posts which are directly concerned by the restructuring.

In this context, the rapporteur wishes to point out that in 2001 the Assembly asked for one upgrading from B5 to B6, three upgradings from B3 to B4 and 2 upgradings from B2 to B3. At the time of writing, no final decision on these proposed staffing changes has been taken.

The staffing changes for 2002 would be limited to three A4 grade staff members. One upgrading from A4 to A5 could become available with the departure of one member of the Assembly Secretariat expected in late 2001, while the other two could be financed within the Assembly's budget by internal transfer of appropriations, thereby making these upgradings budgetarily neutral.

Sub-head 30103 – Recruitment, arrival and departure expenses – Home leave

Sub-head 30104 – Overtime – Statutory and other allowances

The 2002 appropriations under sub-heads 30103 and 30104 should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 2001.

Sub-head 30105 – Remuneration and accessory charges of temporary staff

In recent years, the workload of the English verbatim team has increased significantly. Statistics show that English is the predominant language in a wide range of debates, representing more than 70% of the Assembly's total proceedings. Along with the steady rise of the verbatim duties in spoken English there has been an increase in the number of English speeches to be recorded in full and printed. Furthermore, the number of undelivered speeches handed in for reproduction has risen, involving considerable editing. This has placed an additional strain on the verbatim editor and the latter's limited and over-stretched team. The recruitment of two additional staff members is therefore requested. Similarly, the French summary team, working hand in hand with the English verbatim one, has to prepare an increasing number of summaries for speeches delivered in English and in other languages. Moreover, the French summary team provides journalists with a complete French summary of all speeches delivered. It would therefore be desirable to recruit two additional staff members for the French summary team.

The total cost of this proposed additional recruitment of temporary staff during sessions would be 35 000 euros.

Sub-head 30106 – Provision for adjustments to remuneration – p.m.

Sub-head 30107 – Secondment of national civil servants to the Assembly

The 2002 appropriation under sub-head 30107 should be kept at the same level in real terms as in 2001.

Head 3.2 – Allocation to the Assembly's political groups

Sub-head 30201 – Allocation to the Assembly's political groups

The Assembly's political groups play an increasingly important role in the life of the Assembly. This role has been crucial in enabling the Assembly to maintain its operational capacity and organisational efficiency following enlargement. However, if political groups are to be able to play their full role, they need to be adequately staffed in terms of both level and number. In the medium term, a gradual increase over several financial years should be aimed for, allowing each group to recruit one administrative officer and one secretarial assistant. It is therefore imperative to increase the financial resources of the five political groups.

The allocation to the political groups is calculated on the basis of a lump sum for secretarial assistance to each of the existing groups and an additional per capita allocation according to membership. Appropriations for 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 amounted to 614 400 euros. Each group received a fixed allowance of some 27 440 euros and an additional per capita allowance (some 820 euros per member).

In its Opinions No. 206 (1998), No. 212 (1999) and No. 219 (2000), the Assembly asked for a modest increase of around 10 700 euros per group (53 500 euros in all) to cover the cost of one half-time administrative officer. However, this request was not granted. For 2002, an increase of 10 700 euros in the fixed allowance of each group is once again requested. The total increase requested is therefore 53 500 euros (5 x 10 700 euros), the intention being to have this lump-sum allocation for secretarial services gradually built up over the coming years.

It should also be borne in mind that, along with the increased Assembly membership (Georgia 25 April 1999, Armenia and Azerbaijan 25 January 2001) there has been a parallel increase in the number of members that are not affiliated to any existing political group. Proposals for the possible creation of new political groups cannot therefore be ruled out. It is obvious that the existing appropriations under this sub-head would need to be revised accordingly were this to happen.

Head 3.3 – Supplies, services and other operational expenditure

Since 1975 the appropriations under this head have been voted as a lump sum (budgetary package). The various sub-amounts may subsequently be altered in accordance with Article 31 of the Financial Regulations. Head 3.3 includes all operational expenditure of the Assembly, that is, co-operation and monitoring programmes, publications, interpretation, translation, official journeys, experts, conferences, European prizes, and so on.

In the light of the Committee of Ministers' renewed emphasis on raising the profile of the Organisation, the Assembly has decided to ask for an additional 50 000 euros to enhance the Assembly's public image through the launching of new initiatives aimed at

developing further its interparliamentary co-operation, external relations and communication. This set of activities will focus on three elements: firstly, to further co-operation with national parliaments and other European and international institutions; secondly, to ensure more efficient follow-up to the Assembly's decisions, essential for increasing its credibility in member states; and, thirdly, to make the Assembly's work more visible and accessible to the public at large. These tasks include furthering contacts with journalists and the media as well as working in close co-operation with the Media and Press Division of the Communications and Research Directorate. One future project of the Assembly's communication unit consists in launching its magazine The Europeans not only on its website but also on parliamentary television channels. Other direct expenditure includes subscriptions to news and media monitoring agencies, invitations to journalists, press conferences and briefings, improvements to the Assembly's website and the updating of Assembly publications.