

Opinion 301 (2023)¹

Budgets and priorities of the Council of Europe for the period 2024-2027

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly's Opinion "Budgets and priorities of the Council of Europe for the period 2024-2027" has been prepared under unprecedented circumstances. The war of aggression waged since 24 February 2022 by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, a Council of Europe member State, is a violation of international law and a grave violation of the Statute of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 1), in particular of the principles enshrined in Article 3.
2. As a result of this war, the Russian Federation was expelled from the Council of Europe on 16 March 2022, by a unanimous decision of the Committee of Ministers acting under Article 8 of the Statute and on the basis of the Assembly's [Opinion 300 \(2022\)](#) "Consequences of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine", which was unanimously adopted.
3. The 2024-2027 programming and budgeting process is thus taking place in the context of political, legal and international transformations unfolding in Europe and beyond. These transformations require a re-examination and reassertion of the place and role of the Council of Europe in today's European and global multilateral architecture, and a new focus for its political and budgetary priorities.
4. In this context, the Assembly welcomed the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe held in Reykjavik on 16 and 17 May 2023. It expresses its appreciation for the political commitment of Council of Europe member States, demonstrated by the participation, at the highest level, of their political leaders in the summit and the adoption of the Reykjavik Declaration.
5. The Assembly endorses the Reykjavik Declaration and its appendices, which set the priorities and direction of the Council of Europe's work. It welcomes the recommitment by member States to the fundamental values enshrined in the Council of Europe Statute: democracy, human rights and the rule of law.
6. The Assembly reiterates the importance of the member States' commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and their respect for the authority of the European Court of Human Rights (the Court), whose judgments they are bound to implement. The implementation of the Court's judgments must remain one of the key priorities of the Council of Europe during the next quadrennial programme and budget period. For its part, the Assembly will continue to strengthen the parliamentary dimension of the implementation of judgments, in particular through high-level political dialogue and its regular thematic reports.
7. The Assembly stands together with the leaders of Council of Europe member States, united in support for Ukraine and in ensuring accountability for the crimes committed against a member State. It welcomes the establishment of an Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine (the Register) and calls on all member and observer States, as well as any other States that are eligible according to the Register's Statute, to join as a participant or an associate member. At the same time, the Assembly believes that efforts to ensure accountability and prevent impunity

1. *Assembly debate* on 21 June 2023 (17th sitting) (see [Doc. 15780](#), 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).



should be pursued, including through the establishment of an international ad hoc tribunal, as recommended in [Resolution 2482 \(2023\)](#) “Legal and human rights aspects of the Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine”.

8. Particular attention should be paid to addressing the situation of the children of Ukraine, in line with the declaration adopted at the 4th Summit, and to ensuring the release of civilians, in particular children, forcibly transferred or unlawfully deported to the territory of the Russian Federation or areas under its temporary occupation or control, in accordance with Assembly [Resolution 2495 \(2023\)](#) and [Recommendation 2253 \(2023\)](#) “Deportations and forcible transfers of Ukrainian children and other civilians to the Russian Federation or to temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories: create conditions for their safe return, stop these crimes and punish the perpetrators”.

9. Equally, the Assembly supports the Council of Europe’s commitment to provide concrete, tangible and targeted support to Ukraine through the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine “Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction” (2023-2026). For its part, it will continue to support the Verkhovna Rada in fulfilling Ukraine’s statutory obligations and will provide relevant expertise and peer-to-peer exchanges for parliamentarians. It calls on the governments and parliaments of member States to support these co-operation activities by providing additional extrabudgetary resources.

10. The Assembly welcomes the commitment of member States to strengthening democracy and good governance at all levels, as well as to counteracting democratic backsliding. It will support member States in delivering on the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy. The Assembly believes, moreover, that among the political priorities for the next quadrennial cycle efforts should be continued to provide early warning and rapid reaction, and to provide relevant and targeted support to member States.

11. In its support for more active engagement with civil society and democracy stakeholders, the Assembly emphasises the need to further invest in working with human rights defenders, democratic forces, independent civil society and free media from Belarus and the Russian Federation, who are fighting for the values and principles of the Organisation, including the territorial integrity of sovereign member States. Similarly, the Assembly believes that strengthening the youth perspective in Council of Europe activities should be given every priority as a means to revitalise democracy and enhance young people’s participation in democratic and political processes.

12. Addressing new and emerging human rights challenges must be among the Organisation’s priorities during the 2024-2027 programme and budget cycle. Special attention should be paid to initiatives to uphold the right to a clean, safe, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right, including through the strengthening of the relevant legal framework. Equally, the Assembly supports the commitment made at the summit to initiating the Reykjavik process and looks forward to contributing to it. Legal and human rights aspects of the use of artificial intelligence and emerging digital technologies should remain high on the Organisation’s agenda, including the finalisation of the Council of Europe’s framework convention on artificial intelligence.

13. The Assembly is at the disposal of the Committee of Ministers to contribute to the vision that will underpin the establishment of the intergovernmental committee on environment and human rights (Reykjavik committee), which the Assembly recommends be established as of 1 January 2024. With a view to contributing to the realisation of the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment at national, European and international levels, the Assembly recommends that the Reykjavik committee benefit from multidisciplinary and multisectoral expertise, start with a stock-taking exercise of existing instruments and mechanisms at European and international levels to create synergies and avoid duplication of work, and serve as a platform for the exchange of good practice at all levels.

14. Combating inequalities and discrimination, as well as upholding gender equality, including combating violence against women and promoting the ratification and implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, “Istanbul Convention”), must remain at the forefront of the Council of Europe agenda. Alongside its work on this topic, the Assembly is committed to enhancing equality between women and men in its own structures and working arrangements.

15. The Council of Europe should continue to act as the United Nations’ regional pillar working towards the Sustainable Development Goals, which should continue to be mainstreamed in all its activities. The Assembly welcomes the commitment made at the summit to strengthen the institutional partnership with the European Union and calls for a speedy completion of the process of accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights.

16. Given the depth and ambition of the priorities set by the leaders of the member States at the 4th Summit, it is clear that the Council of Europe should be granted resources that are commensurate with the level of member States' political ambition for the Organisation. To effectively deliver on the decisions taken at the summit, the Organisation's resources should be increased over and above the budgetary perspective of zero real growth. The sustainability of the Council of Europe's activities requires unwavering commitment and investment by our member States in terms of financial contributions.

17. Therefore, the Assembly calls upon the member States to invest sufficient additional resources in the Organisation to allow it to deliver on the outcomes of the 4th Summit. It is convinced that the need to match resources with ambition will remain at the forefront of the discussions in the Committee of Ministers during the 2024-2027 budgetary process.

18. The Assembly welcomes all the work put in over recent years to modernise and reform the working methods and governance of the Council of Europe, led by the Committee of Ministers, the Secretary General and the Deputy Secretary General, including the introduction of the Results-Based Management Strategy and the implementation of the People Strategy. It welcomes the approval by the Committee of Ministers of the Capital Master Plan which, *inter alia* provides for the refurbishment and modernisation of the Assembly Chamber in 2023 and 2024.

19. The Assembly recalls its own initiatives to modernise its tools and working methods, including through the PACE-Apps application, with a view to attaining the objective of paperless operation, thus reducing the Assembly's – and the Council of Europe's – costs as well as its carbon footprint in an overall effort to address environmental challenges. Digital modernisation will therefore continue to be high on the Assembly's own list of priorities during the 2024-2027 programme and budget period, as will the management of its staff and budgetary resources according to best practices, in line with the reforms put in place in the whole Organisation.