

Living up to the Reykjavik Summit's Promise: The need for Extra Resources for the Council of Europe

Discussion is currently underway on the budget of the Council of Europe after the organisation's 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government held in May 2023 in Reykjavik. The Summit's Declaration¹ set out to strengthen the Council's work to protect and promote human rights, the rule of law and democracy on the European continent. The Summit also agreed to step up cooperation with the Ukrainian justice system and to create a Register of Damage resulting from the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. CURE – Campaign to Uphold Rights in Europe calls on the organisation's member states to overcome traditional reluctance to increase the budget to implement the steps agreed in Reykjavik.

The current budgeting process was kicked off in June by a framework proposal presented by the Council's Secretary General² that suggests adding € 31 million to the budget of 2024 to implement the Reykjavik strategic priorities. A further € 22 million would be added to compensate for expected cost increases, leading to a proposed general budget of € 352 million for 2024³ and bringing the **total increase to about 18%**. A more detailed proposal along the same lines was submitted at the end of August; at the same time member states' representatives also asked for a paper outlining scenarios for a lower rise of the budget, with some of them even asking for a "zero nominal growth" option (no compensation for cost increases) to be developed.⁴ Final decision-making is scheduled in the week of 20 November.⁵

Most of the abovementioned € 31 million amount (about € 25 million) would be allocated for cooperation programmes with Council of Europe's member states aimed at improving their legislative and policy frameworks and at capacity building. This concerns providing support to previously planned activities which are currently funded from voluntary contributions. Finally, the remaining € 6 million, which amounts to only around 2% of the budget, would mean a real resource increase for some of the Reykjavik Declaration's priorities, including:

¹ See https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=0900001680ab364c. In the meantime, the CoE's Committee of Ministers has decided on an allocation of the Reykjavik Declaration's substance to the different Rapporteur Groups of the Committee (its preparatory discussion bodies), for further discussion about their implementation, see https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=0900001680abdc30.

² This (non-public) paper was discussed in the CoE's Budget Committee in the beginning of June 2023, see https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=0900001680ab8d67 (item 7); it was also referred to by the Secretary General in her exchange with the PACE on 19 June 2023, see <https://pace.coe.int/en/verbatim/2023-06-19/pm/en#speech-23948>.

³ The given figures correspond to the so-called "General Budget," which is jointly funded by the member states according to a formula that creates the scales of contribution taking into account the national income and the number of inhabitants.

⁴ Again this is a non-public paper; it was discussed in the Budget Committee on 26 September, see https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=0900001680acbc96, point 7. Appendix III of the Budget Committee report contains the alternatives scenarios for the budgets 2024-2025

⁵ The timeline of the budget preparations can be found here: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=0900001680aac50a (page 5).

- the European Court of Human Rights, ECtHR (+ € 3.5 million, 4.5% increase⁶) and the work on the implementation of its judgements (+ € 0.3 million, 1.5% increase);
- the Commissioner for Human Rights (+ € 0.4 million, 10% increase);
- implementation of the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy, including improvement of the Council of Europe’s engagement with civil society (+ € 0.4 million);
- work on the defense of a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (+ € 0.5 million);
- work against the smuggling of migrants and the protection of their rights (+ € 0.2 million).

Other priorities established by the Reykjavík Declaration, such as the **Register of Damage and strengthening the work of the Venice Commission**, would also receive additional funding, but this comes from special contributions by those states that take part in the so-called “enlarged” and “partial” agreements, under which they operate.

CURE is urging the member states to support the modest budget increase proposed by the Secretary General to allow for full implementation of the Reykjavík priorities. For a number of years before 2020, “zero nominal growth” has been applied for member state contributions to the budget, seeking improvements in output by increasing efficiency. Since 2020, this has been replaced by “zero real growth” as the effect of the restraining budgetary approach seemed to have reached its limits, and **the organisation’s capacity to deliver even in the most basic areas of its work was put at risk**.

Delays must be shortened that have built up in dealing with complaints submitted to the ECtHR and in following up on the implementation of its judgements. Besides, **not all the CoE conventions’ monitoring mechanisms currently seem to function at an appropriate level** (the Secretary General’s proposal specifically points to the Berne Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats in this regard).

The call for a budget increase in real terms is in line with inputs from different stakeholders before the Reykjavík Summit, including the **High-level Reflection Group’s report of October 2022**⁷, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (**PACE recommendation of January 2023**⁸), and **The Hague Civil Society Declaration of March 2023**⁹. It was repeated by the PACE after the Summit in its **opinion on the budgets and priorities of the Council of Europe for the period 2024-2027** adopted in June 2023: ‘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.**¹⁰

Contact: info@cure-campaign.org

⁶ The current budget, including allocations for specific CoE institutions and programmes, can be found at https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680a9663f.

⁷ See <https://rm.coe.int/report-of-the-high-level-reflection-group-of-the-council-of-europe/1680a862eb>

⁸ Recommendation 2245 (2023) The Reykjavik Summit of the Council of Europe: United around values in the face of extraordinary challenges, adopted by the PACE on 24 January 2023, see <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/31592/html>.

⁹ The Hague Civil Society Declaration on Council of Europe Reform, see <https://cure-campaign.org/wp-content/uploads/CSSDeclarationFullFinal.pdf>.

¹⁰ Opinion 301 (2023) Budgets and priorities of the Council of Europe for 2024-2027 adopted by the PACE on 21 June 2023, see <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/32974/html>.