



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/41/795
5 November 1986

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Forty-first session
Agenda item 38

REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL
FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS: REPORT OF THE GROUP OF
HIGH-LEVEL INTERGOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS TO REVIEW THE
EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Report of the Fifth Committee

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its 3rd plenary meeting, on 20 September 1986, the General Assembly decided to include in the agenda of its forty-first session the item entitled "Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations: report of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations". At the same meeting, the General Assembly also decided that the item would be considered in plenary meetings of the Assembly, and that, during the course of this consideration, the Fifth Committee would, within the scope of its responsibilities, undertake a factual examination of the report and submit its findings to the plenary.

2. For the consideration of this question the Fifth Committee had before it the report of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts (A/41/49) as well as a note by the Secretary-General (A/41/663). The Committee also noted the text of a statement by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) (A/41/763) and communications from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/C.5/41/25) and from the President of the United Nations Council for Namibia (A/41/781).

3. The Fifth Committee considered this item at its 11th, 13th to 19th and 21st meetings, on 16 and 23 to 30 October and 5 November 1986. In addition, the

Committee held 11 informal meetings during the period from 16 to 23 October, in order to conduct a first reading of the report. Further informal consultations were held during the period from 24 October to 5 November 1986 with a view to elaborating a draft of the Committee's submission to the Plenary.

4. During these informal meetings, a number of questions were posed by delegations to which answers were subsequently provided, at formal meetings, by the Chairman of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts, the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission and the representatives of the Secretary-General.

5. The Committee also decided, in keeping with the practice it has followed pursuant to General Assembly resolution 35/213 of 17 December 1980, to invite a representative of the staff of the United Nations Secretariat (who spoke also on behalf of the Co-ordinating Committee of Independent Staff Associations and Unions (CCISUA)) and a representative of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) to present their views to the Committee.

6. The comments and observations made in the course of the discussion of the item and the replies to questions raised are reflected in the pertinent summary records of the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/41/SR.11, 13 to 19 and 21).

7. During the consideration of this question and in the elaboration of its findings, the Fifth Committee took fully into account the statements made by delegations during the general debate of the current session of the General Assembly and during the debate on this item conducted during the 33rd to 39th plenary meetings of the General Assembly, from 10 to 15 October 1986 (A/41/PV 33-39).

II. FINDINGS OF THE FIFTH COMMITTEE

General findings

8. The Fifth Committee noted, as stated in paragraph 11 of the report of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts, that:

"The time constraints under which the Group had to work did not allow it to make a comprehensive study of some of the extremely complex problems put before it."

9. The Committee also noted that not all relevant subsidiary organs of the General Assembly submitted to the Group information and comments on matters pertaining to their work, as envisaged in paragraph 7 of General Assembly resolution 40/237.

10. The Committee noted that the Group had decided not to make reference in the report to the scale of assessment or to the questions of withholdings and of arrears in payment of assessed contributions. The payment of assessed contributions affects directly the efficiency of the administrative and financial

functioning of the United Nations not only in the short, but also in the medium and long term. In reply to questions posed by the Fifth Committee in this regard, the Chairman of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts stated that:

"as part of its deliberations pertaining to the financial functioning of the Organization, the scale of assessments had been discussed, inter alia, questions of lowering the ceiling of contributions, raising the floor and criteria for deciding upon the contributions of Member States. These discussions had proved inconclusive. As a result, the Group had unanimously decided not to reflect this discussion in its report."

11. In submitting its findings to the General Assembly, the Fifth Committee wishes to stress the importance attached to the need for full respect for the relevant provisions of the Charter, its principles and its aims, in the implementation of those recommendations of the Group that the Assembly may approve.

12. It is recognized that the objective of all such recommendations is to achieve an improvement in the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations. Accordingly, their implementation should be consistent with that goal. It was stressed that the approved measures should be put into effect in a coherent, orderly and co-ordinated manner.

13. The findings submitted by the Fifth Committee are aimed at assisting and facilitating the work of the General Assembly in reaching its conclusions. The findings would serve as a point of reference in the implementation of those recommendations that may be approved by the General Assembly.

Findings on specific recommendations

14. The findings of the Fifth Committee with regard to the recommendations of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts are set out in the following paragraphs.

THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL MACHINERY AND ITS FUNCTIONING (A/41/49, sect. II)

Recommendation 1

15. The aim of this recommendation is to strengthen the Committee on Conferences and to give it broader responsibilities. The objective is to increase the harmonization of working procedures of conference services and to improve implementation of decisions on all organizational aspects dealing with conferences by legislative bodies, on the understanding that there should be full respect for the mandates of other legislative organs and the responsibilities of the Secretariat and in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 40/243. The "highest" level of membership referred to in subparagraph (a) of this recommendation should be regarded in terms of expertise.

Recommendation 2

16. The objective of this recommendation is to reduce the number, frequency and duration of meetings, without affecting negatively the substantive work of the Organization. In view of Article 72 of the Charter, the General Assembly should invite the Economic and Social Council to consider recommendation 2 (a).

Recommendation 3

17. The sequential order of the Fourth Committee and the Special Political Committee referred to in subparagraph (c) of this recommendation should be during each session of the General Assembly and the number of meetings accorded to each of these Main Committees should be in conformity with their respective programmes of work.

18. With regard to subparagraph (e), its implementation should be in accordance with the provisions of Article 22 of the Charter. The decision to establish a new subsidiary organ should be taken only after it is determined that the task could not be performed by an existing one with a similar mandate.

19. In regard to recommendation 3 (f), the Fifth Committee reiterated the right of Member States to present resolutions which they deem necessary.

Recommendation 4

20. The implementation of this recommendation should be in line with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 40/243.

Recommendation 5

21. In respect of this recommendation, the Fifth Committee wishes to draw to the attention of the General Assembly that it has approved two projects relating to construction of United Nations conference facilities, which are yet to be completed. The Committee also notes the principle that programmes, once approved by the General Assembly, should be implemented.

Recommendation 8

22. The Committee found that the study referred to in recommendation 8 (1) could be undertaken by an existing intergovernmental body such as the Economic and Social Council or the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination.

23. In connection with recommendation 8 (3) (d), the intergovernmental body conducting the study should seek the co-operation and views of the intergovernmental organs concerned with United Nations operational activities for development.

Subsection II.C

24. The Committee noted that, in paragraph 9 of its report, the Group had indicated that "The relationship between the Organization, including its subsidiary bodies, and the specialized agencies, as well as system-wide co-ordination and co-operation, ... falls outside the mandate of the Group." The recommendations contained in this subsection (recommendations 9 to 13) should be viewed in this context.

Recommendation 9

25. This recommendation should be viewed in the light of the above observation and addressed to the concerned Charter organs of the United Nations.

Recommendation 10

26. The Committee was not able to find a clear indication as to whether the intention of this recommendation is the establishment of a new co-ordinating body in addition to or instead of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC). The Committee did note, however, the statement of ACC (A/41/763) to the effect that the discussion proposed "is already being undertaken by ACC in its regular biannual sessions. ACC believes that the objective of this recommendation could be further achieved by convening subject-oriented sessions of ACC and by recourse to functional groups, instead of creating a new mechanism as proposed by the Group of High-level Experts."

STRUCTURE OF THE SECRETARIAT
(A/41/49, sect. III)

Recommendation 15

27. The Fifth Committee noted that the percentages referred to in this recommendation were arrived at in a pragmatic manner. Taking into account the need to avoid any negative effect on the implementation of programmes, the percentages represent targets that should be utilized by the Secretary-General in formulating his plans to be submitted to the General Assembly. In formulating such plans, the Secretary-General should take into account the relationship between the intergovernmental machinery and existing legislative mandates and the need to secure an effective and efficient secretariat structure, bearing in mind the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity of the staff, with due regard to equitable geographical distribution.

28. During its examination of this question, the Committee was apprised of the manner in which the Secretary-General would approach the implementation of this recommendation, if approved, notably, that:

"The process of reviewing and reducing posts, including those at the higher level, could begin immediately and not await the completion of all the reviews [recommended by the Group]. A reduction could take place but, until such time as the Assembly approves any structural changes in the Secretariat, the Secretary-General would need to have authority to implement reductions in 1987 with flexibility, within the total level of posts for the Secretariat as a whole.

"Post reductions would have to be done initially on a pragmatic basis, designed to match available resources with the least possible disruption to programmes and to the lives and rights of the people involved. Final determination of the reductions in 1988 and 1989 that are feasible and compatible with minimal disruption to programmes and the lives and rights of staff members can only be judiciously made after the full impact of any retrenchments in 1987 has been assessed.

"The Secretary-General, of course, would aim at achieving these reductions to the maximum extent possible through the full utilization of the attrition mechanism. Such a mechanism, however, might not be compatible with minimizing disruption to programmes. If this were to be the case, additional financial costs may be required to achieve the post reductions targeted. Mechanisms such as the redeployment of staff between programmes and between duty stations might also need to be applied, and these may entail additional expenditures.

"In summary, if the Assembly accepts the intent of recommendation 15 to reduce posts by the order of magnitude indicated in it, the Secretary-General would aim at the targets given in the manner and under the considerations ... indicated. He would need to proceed with flexibility under the provisions of the Charter and the Staff and Financial Rules and Regulations. Similarly, some flexibility will be needed to defer or modify approved programmes or terminate approved activities considered to be of low priority. The Secretary-General would, of course, consult with the ACABQ and the CPC."

The Fifth Committee understood that these consultations would be conducted in accordance with pertinent rules and regulations.

29. As to the effect of any reduction in posts on the geographical distribution of the staff, the Committee noted the following statement by the representative of the Secretary-General:

"Any reduction in the overall number of posts will certainly imply a reduction in the number of staff in posts subject to geographical distribution. This will in turn entail a revision of the desirable ranges of representation and the base figure used to calculate them."

30. The Committee also noted the indication by the representative of the Secretary-General as to the savings that could be gained from the reductions in posts proposed in recommendation 15, namely, that:

"A 15 per cent reduction in the number of posts would result, at current cost, in direct savings of approximately \$141 million per biennium; the indirect savings had not been calculated. As regards a 25 per cent reduction in the higher echelon, savings would amount to approximately \$3.3 million on salaries and common staff costs."

31. As to the impact on the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund of the recommendation for reduction of posts by 15 per cent over three years, the Committee was informed that the Fund's Consulting Actuary had indicated that:

"... on the assumption that the reduction would be achieved by attrition, it would entail a decrease in the active participant population of the Fund by 1 per cent a year for three years. This would increase the actuarial imbalance by up to 0.17 per cent of pensionable remuneration. To offset this impact, the Fund would need additional contribution income of up to \$3 million per year."

32. As to that part of the recommendation dealing with the recruitment of staff at the P-1, P-2 and P-3 levels, the Committee noted the statement by the representative of the Secretary-General that:

"... assuming approval by the Assembly, it would be the intention of the Secretary-General to recruit, in the course of 1987, staff at the P-1, P-2 and P-3 levels. However, he would not wish to be held to an exact figure at this time, or to those three levels alone. This will, of course, be influenced by the financial situation in 1987."

Furthermore, the representative of the Secretary-General indicated that:

"although a preliminary review of existing vacancies and projected attrition indicates that it might be possible, at least initially, to maintain the average number of recruitments at P-1, P-2 and P-3 levels at the rate of appointments comparable to those for the period 1982-1984, one cannot be definite as this would depend on the overall reduction of posts and its effect on the reduced career progression of junior and intermediate staff. It might therefore not be possible to maintain the same level of appointments as immediately appear feasible."

33. The Fifth Committee highlighted the interrelationship between recommendation ... and other recommendations in the report.

34. The Committee noted that the General Assembly would consider in more detail the implications of this recommendation, if approved, when the Secretary-General presents the plan of implementation called for in paragraph 3 of the recommendation. In this regard the Committee noted the statement by the Secretary-General (A/41/663, para. 4) that:

"there is ... a direct relationship between possible changes in the intergovernmental machinery and modifications in the size, composition and work of the Secretariat staff. Similarly, changes in the structure and staffing in those areas of the Secretariat where the Group of Experts has recommended a functional review can best be made after these reviews are completed."

Recommendation 19

35. The Committee noted that any decision that may be adopted in this respect should be clearly aimed at strengthening the efficiency of all Secretariat activities relating to Namibia, without in any way limiting the programmes and services in this area, in order to enhance the Organization's capacity to deal with this matter of high importance.

Recommendation 21

36. The Committee noted that there has been a decrease in the work-load of the Department of Political Affairs, Trusteeship and Decolonization as a result of progress achieved in matters of decolonization and trusteeship; on the other hand, the reorientation of tasks assigned to the Department has resulted in an increase in its work-load related to political affairs. This recommendation should be implemented in the light of the findings of the Fifth Committee under recommendations 15 and 19.

Recommendation 22

37. The Committee noted that special economic assistance programmes are currently approved by the General Assembly, funded by voluntary contributions and administered by the Office for Special Political Questions, which is funded by the regular budget. The Committee noted that this recommendation involves transferring the administration of special economic assistance programmes from the regular budget to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In implementing this recommendation, if approved, the impact of the transfer of the administration of these programmes on the functioning of UNDP should be ascertained. Implementation of this recommendation should neither hinder the approval nor negatively affect the delivery of special economic assistance programmes.

Recommendation 24

38. The Committee noted the different nature and functions of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator and the United Nations Development Programme, and considered that the Secretary-General should participate in the consideration referred to in this recommendation.

Recommendation 25

39. In its examination of recommendation 25 (1), the Committee noted that the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade would be the only organization external to the United Nations that would be invited to participate in an internal United Nations review.

40. With regard to recommendation 25 (2), the Committee pointed out that, at its last meeting, the Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology for Development evaluated and approved the activities of the Centre for Science and Technology for Development. Accordingly, if this recommendation were adopted, that evaluation should be taken into account when considering the feasibility of integrating the Centre into the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs and the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development.

41. In connection with recommendation 25 (3), the Committee noted that the functions of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation were specified in General Assembly resolution 32/197 and subsequent resolutions, most recently Economic and Social Council resolution 1986/74. It also noted that, in the Secretary-General's view, no further legislative authority is required.

42. Should consideration of recommendation 25 (4) be envisaged, it should be done in observance of relevant General Assembly resolutions.

Recommendation 27

43. The Committee noted that the suitability of the activities of the regional commissions is a matter to be determined primarily by the Member States concerned and that the regional commissions should be consulted on any action to be taken in this regard.

Recommendation 29

44. The Committee recalled that the General Assembly, at its thirty-ninth session, noted a report of the Joint Inspection Unit commenting favourably upon the Office of Secretariat Services for Economic and Social Matters.

Recommendation 31

45. The Committee noted the view expressed by the representative of the Secretary-General that the function of the Management Advisory Service would continue to be necessary, precisely at a time when the administrative and financial efficiency of the Organization is being examined.

Recommendation 32

46. The Committee pointed out that co-ordination between different units of the Secretariat in the areas of planning, programming and budgeting is at present dealt with at the level of the Programme Planning and Budgeting Board, which was created in 1982. The manner in which this recommendation will be implemented, if approved, should be viewed in the light of the decisions that the General Assembly may take regarding section VI of the Group's report.

Recommendation 35

47. The Committee was informed that the intention of the Group was that the 30 per cent reduction proposed for outside consultants related to the original appropriations approved by the General Assembly for this purpose for the current biennium.

MEASURES REGARDING PERSONNEL
(A/41/49, sect. IV)

48. The Committee noted that, in any question regarding the administration of the staff, the responsibilities and prerogatives of the Secretary-General under the Charter as the Chief Administrative Officer of the Organization must be acknowledged and respected. Furthermore, in connection with the consideration of section IV of the report, the Committee emphasized the importance of observing fully the provisions of Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter.

49. The Committee also noted the importance of the preservation of the common system and the need to avail of the expertise of the International Civil Service Commission, in accordance with the provisions of the Commission's statute, in dealing with those recommendations relating to issues over which the Commission has a mandate (recommendations 53 and 61 would have a direct impact on the common system, while recommendations 42, 43, 45, 48, 49, 50, 52, 55, 57, 58 and 60 deal with issues over which the Commission has a mandate under articles 14 and 15 of its statute, to advise and make recommendations to organizations).

50. The Committee also took note of paragraphs 9 and 10 of the note by the Secretary-General (A/41/663).

Recommendation 41

51. The Fifth Committee notes the emphasis in recommendation 41 on the need for leadership by the Secretary-General in personnel matters, for management improvement in this area and for protection of the authority of the official in charge of personnel. This emphasis is in line with previous resolutions of the General Assembly. The Fifth Committee notes the intention of the Secretary-General "to review all delegations of authority in the personnel field to determine the possible existence of either conflict or confusion and if found, to correct that situation". The Fifth Committee further notes that a report on this subject was requested in General Assembly resolution 40/258 for submission to the Assembly at its forty-first session.

Recommendation 43

52. The Fifth Committee notes the need to ensure that, in the competitive examination process, procedures should be non-discriminatory (in terms, inter alia, of content, methods and languages) and should be based on objective methods and criteria. The Committee further notes that so far competitive examinations at the P-3 level have been proposed only on an experimental basis.

Recommendation 44

53. The Committee found that the objective of this recommendation is to increase the proportion of appointments at the junior professional levels (P-1, P-2 and P-3). In this process, the paramount consideration shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity, with due regard being paid to the importance of recruiting staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible.

Recommendation 45

54. The Committee noted the statement of the Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission that the Group had recommended a three-year eligibility period for permanent appointment, instead of a five-year period established by the General Assembly in resolution 37/126. However, the Committee also noted the indication given by the representative of the Secretary-General that:

"the current eligibility for a permanent appointment is already three years and, in some cases, even less. A permanent appointment should not depend only on length of service. Therefore, no hard-and-fast rule should be established."

Recommendations 46 and 47

55. The Committee noted that the expression "relevant resolutions" includes all resolutions on personnel questions. The Committee also noted that the General Assembly will consider these matters in more detail when the Secretary-General presents his progress report on the measures taken to implement these recommendations as called for in recommendation 69.

Recommendation 51

56. The Committee noted that, in relation to the last sentence of this recommendation, the structuring of the appointment and promotion bodies on the basis of occupational groups is linked with recommendation 48.

Recommendation 53

57. The Committee noted the statement of the Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission that the role of monitoring the implementation of standards dealing with personnel management is already assigned to the Commission under its statute, and his interpretation of "monitoring" as "regulation and co-ordination" in the context of article 1 and "reporting" in the context of article 17 of the ICSC statute.

Recommendations 55 and 57

58. The Committee noted that, as stated in the report itself, some members of the Group had indicated that the second sentence of each of these recommendations should not be included in the report of the Group. It further noted the statement by the Chairman of the Group indicating that these recommendations had not enjoyed the necessary support.

Recommendation 58

59. The Committee noted the necessity for effective training programmes geared to the needs of the Organization and to ensuring the optimum utilization of the human and financial resources to be allocated.

Recommendation 59

60. The Committee noted the Secretary-General's view that:

The facilitating of staff representational activities and of the activities of joint staff-management bodies, as provided for in the Staff Regulations and Rules, does not derogate from his managerial prerogatives, nor should it. "Self-financing by the staff unions of all their activities could be a step backward in staff-management relations in the international civil service".

The Committee also noted the Group's recommendation that:

"The efficiency of the Organization would be increased if clear guidelines were established for the role and functions of the Staff Union ..." and that "Staff unions or associations should finance all their activities from their own funds".

Recommendation 61

61. The Committee noted that the matters dealt with under recommendation 61 are covered under the provisions of the statute of ICSC and that implementing this recommendation without consulting ICSC could be damaging to the common system. The Committee noted also that the Chairman of the Group of High-level Experts envisaged that:

"... this recommendation, if adopted by the General Assembly, will be subject to thorough consideration by the competent organs of this Organization, particularly the ICSC, before the final recommendations are being presented to the General Assembly for approval".

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND INSPECTION
(A/41/49, sect. V)

Recommendations 63-67

62. The Committee noted that the proposed revision of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit, if accepted by the General Assembly, would be only for the purpose of changing the name of the Unit.

63. These recommendations should, if adopted, be implemented in a manner consistent with the provisions of the statute of the Unit and with due regard for the need to avoid duplication of work being done by Secretariat units and offices and technical and expert bodies.

PLANNING AND BUDGET PROCEDURE
(A/41/49, sect. VI)

64. With due regard to the responsibilities of the Secretary-General, the Committee noted that Member States should be involved, in a more structured manner, in the planning, programming and budgeting procedure from the very beginning and throughout the whole process.

65. The intergovernmental machinery must be improved (and adjusted if necessary).

66. The Committee recognized that there is a need for early establishment of guidance by the General Assembly on the overall level of resources to accommodate the activities of the Organization during the following biennium and on priorities. The Committee noted in this regard the statements by the representative of the Secretary-General that:

"The Secretary-General would welcome the earlier involvement of Member States in the budgetary process, say in the year of issuance of the budget instructions, at which time they could give their views on the appropriate level of real growth in the forthcoming budget and also on such policy matters as the priorities to govern the distribution of resources in that forthcoming budget"

and that

"Once priorities are set by Member States as part of their review of the next medium-term plan, these priorities would govern the formulation of the three programme budgets to be made up in conformity with this plan."

67. The Committee notes that, in order to facilitate agreement among Member States on the content and level of the budget, the existing rules and regulations pertaining to the setting of priorities should be strictly applied by the intergovernmental bodies concerned and by the Secretariat.

68. With regard to the medium-term plan:

(a) The Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation pertaining to the medium-term plan should be fully implemented;

(b) The introduction to the plan will constitute a key, integral element in the planning process and should be subject to wide consultations among Member States;

(c) In formulating the plan, sectoral, technical, regional and central bodies in the United Nations should be consulted in a systematic way regarding the major programmes in the plan;

(d) The Secretary-General should draw up calendars for the consultations described above.

69. With regard to the programme budget:

(a) The formulation and presentation of the proposed programme budget is a responsibility of the Secretary-General. Accordingly, at an appropriate time in the non-budget year, the Secretary-General should present, for consideration and approval by Member States, an outline of the programme budget for the next biennium, based on the medium-term plan and on decisions taken by the legislative organs of the United Nations, with an indication of the overall level of resources to accommodate the activities of the Organization during the following biennium and on priorities;

(b) This outline should include expenditures related to the political activities of a "perennial character" and their related conference costs;

(c) The outline should also include a contingency fund covering the same budget period, expressed as a percentage of the overall level of resources, to accommodate "add-ons";

(d) If "add-ons" are proposed that exceed resources available within the contingency fund, such "add-ons" can only be included in the budget through redeployment of resources from low-priority areas, or modifications of existing activities. Otherwise, such additional activities will have to be deferred to a later biennium (unless the General Assembly decides otherwise).

70. An indicative list of points still to be resolved follows:

(a) The decision-making process;

(b) The intergovernmental machinery;

(c) The definition of "add-ons";

(d) The basis for determining the level of resources (i.e. "available", "necessary" or "amount of resources that Member States can and are prepared to make available").
