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Agenda item 54MEASURES TO LIMIT THE DURATION OF REGULAR SESSIONS
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLYReport of the Sixth CommitteeRapporteur: Mr. J. SPIROPOULOS (Greece)

1. At the 373rd plenary meeting held on 4 February 1952, the General Assembly at its sixth session decided that it should examine the item "Measures to limit the duration of regular sessions of the General Assembly". The same decision requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with States Members and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, to prepare a working paper on the subject with appropriate comments and recommendations.
2. The Secretary-General's memorandum^{1/} was examined by the General Assembly at its seventh session. By resolution 689 A (VII) of 21 December 1952, the Assembly established a Special Committee of fifteen members to consider the Secretary-General's memorandum and any other information communicated to it by Member States and to submit its recommendations to the General Assembly. The Secretary-General was requested to transmit the Special Committee's report to Member States for comment and to include the item in the provisional agenda of the eighth session of the General Assembly.
3. The session of the Special Committee on Measures to Limit the Duration of Regular Sessions of the General Assembly opened on 25 May and concluded on 22 June 1953. The results of its work, in the course of which the Committee examined each section of the Secretary-General's memorandum and the observations

^{1/} See Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixth Session, Annexes, agenda item 50, document A/2206.

and suggestions submitted by the governments of various States Members, are recorded in a report which the Committee has submitted to the General Assembly (A/2402). The report includes general remarks on the problem which the Committee was appointed to examine, and its observations and conclusions on (a) the agenda of Assembly sessions; (b) the consideration by the Assembly of reports of the Councils; (c) the scope of proposals made in the Committees; (d) the conduct of debates in the Committees; (e) measures to limit these debates; (f) points of order; (g) the consideration of items in plenary meetings and between sessions; (h) the scheduling of meetings, and (i) the question of the participation of the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Political Committee in the work of the General Committee. The Committee pointed out that the question of the methods of work of the General Assembly should be kept under review in the light of the changing needs and new requirements of the Assembly, and recommended that an outline of the practices advocated in its report should be included in a consolidated annex to the rules of procedure in order to facilitate and encourage the observance of such practices in the future.

4. The Special Committee endorsed only two of the amendments to the rules of procedure proposed by the Secretary-General in his memorandum (A/2206): the amendment to rules 73 and 113 which provided that in addition to the proposer of a motion to limit the time allowed to each speaker, two representatives only might speak in favour of the motion and two against it, and the amendment to rule 38 which included among the members of the General Committee the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Political Committee when one was established by the General Assembly.

5. At its 435th plenary meeting held on 17 September 1953 the General Assembly decided, upon the recommendation of the General Committee, to include the item "Measures to limit the duration of regular sessions of the General Assembly: report of the Special Committee" in the agenda of its eighth session and to refer the item to the Sixth Committee for consideration.

6. The Sixth Committee considered the item from its 360th meeting, held on 25 September 1953, to its 366th meeting, held on 6 October 1953.

7. The Committee's discussions were based on the Special Committee's report and a draft resolution submitted by Norway (A/C.6/L.292). The draft resolution adopting the Special Committee's conclusions, stated in its preamble that the General Assembly, having considered the report of the Special Committee, recognized the importance of adopting measures to limit the duration of its regular sessions without restricting the right of Members to speak fully and freely. Paragraph 1 of the operative part amended rule 38 and paragraph 2 amended rules 73 and 113 of the rules of procedure in the manner proposed by the Special Committee. Paragraph 3 proposed that the Assembly should decide to annex to its rules of procedure an outline of the practices recommended by the Special Committee in its report, in order to facilitate and encourage the observance of such practices in the future. Paragraph 4 requested the Secretary-General to consider the question of consolidating the new annex and existing annexes to the rules of procedure, and, if such consolidation were considered advantageous, to publish a new edition of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly containing the consolidated annex.

8. A revision of this draft resolution (A/C.6/L.292/Rev.1) which was submitted by Norway annexed to the above-mentioned provisions of the draft resolution a number of extracts from the Special Committee's report which, if adopted, were to constitute a new annex to the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

9. The following amendments were submitted to the Committee:

(a) an amendment submitted by Brazil and France (A/C.6/L.293) proposed:
(i) to replace the preamble of the Norwegian draft resolution by a simple reference to General Assembly resolution 689 (VII) and to the report of the Special Committee; (ii) to insert in the operative part a paragraph 1 in which the General Assembly would take note of the Special Committee's report; and (iii) to delete paragraphs 3 and 4.

(b) a United Kingdom amendment (A/C.6/L.295) amending the second sentence of rule 39 of the rules of procedure so as to make it clear that, as in the case of chairmen of Main Committees, the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Political Committee would, in case of absence, designate the Vice-Chairman

of the Committee as his substitute. The amendment also proposed that in conformity with the revision of rule 2 of the rules of procedure adopted by the General Assembly at its seventh session, the words "the target date for the closing of the session fixed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the General Committee" in rule 98 of the rules of procedure should be replaced by the words "the closing date for the session fixed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the General Committee".

(c) an amendment submitted by Ecuador and Guatemala (A/C.6/L.296) to the Franco-Brazilian amendment, which proposed the deletion not only of paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Norwegian draft resolution but also of paragraph 2, and thus the retention of rules 73 and 113 of the rules of procedure of the Assembly in their present form.

10. In the course of the general debate, those representatives who in general supported the Special Committee's conclusions stressed the moderate character of the solutions proposed and expressed the belief that they would not restrict the right of free discussion. The proposed annex to the rules of procedure would not be binding, but would, like the existing annexes, serve as a useful guide to the chairmen of meetings and to delegations. Certain representatives pointed out that the excessive length of sessions imposed heavy financial burdens on their governments and raised problems with regard to the composition of their delegations. It was difficult for many representatives of States Members to spend long periods abroad without seriously neglecting their duties at home.

11. Other representatives expressed their opposition to any measure which might in any way restrict the freedom of speech which should prevail in the General Assembly as a world forum. In their view, whatever disadvantages might result from the sometimes excessive length of discussions, there should be no impairment of the absolute right of each State Member to speak in any debate and no limit should be set on the speeches of their representatives, beyond that of reasonable length. According to these representatives, the provisions

of the rules as they stood made it possible to avoid any serious loss of time. The problem of the duration of General Assembly sessions was due, not to technical causes, but to the nature of the questions on the Assembly's agenda and to the general political atmosphere in which it worked. Some representatives pointed out that there was a fundamental difference between the proceedings of the Assembly and those of national Parliaments. The General Assembly was essentially a deliberative body, and was not homogenous; its members were not representatives of organized parties, grouped in a majority and a minority, but representatives of sovereign and equal States entitled to express and defend their opinions according to their own conceptions of international interest and the safeguarding of their rights. In the General Assembly a majority usually formed in the course of discussion, when the various shades of opinion had been expressed.

12. Several representatives spoke against the proposal to annex extracts from the Special Committee's report to the rules of procedure of the Assembly. They expressed the view that it would be preferable for the Assembly not to take a decision on the substance of the Special Committee's recommendations. The problem which had been referred to the Committee was still fluid; it was liable to modification at a later date and it ought to be kept under review. The Committee's recommendations could not therefore constitute a final solution. Moreover, the proposed annex would have no legal value. Since it would not be binding, it would serve little purpose and might become a source of ambiguity.

13. With particular reference to the proposed amendment to rules 73 and 113, certain representatives pointed out that there was a difference between the provisions of this rule and those of the other rules which limited the number of speakers in debates on procedural motions. They considered that these two provisions applied only when full discussions had already taken place, whereas if the proposed amendments to rules 73 and 113 were adopted, delegations might be deprived of any opportunity of expressing their views. It was also noted that the proposed amendment allowed three persons to speak in favour of a motion to limit the time allowed to speeches and only two speakers to speak against.

14. The delegations supporting the amendment considered that the distinction drawn with regard to other procedural motions limiting the number of speakers was too fine to justify its rejection. They declared that it would be absurd if it were made possible to discuss without any limit a motion to limit the time allowed to speakers. The present provisions of rules 76 and 116 were, they thought, more restrictive than those proposed for rules 73 and 113.

15. Some representatives, while supporting the amendment to rule 38 proposed by the Special Committee, expressed the wish that the legal status of the Ad Hoc Political Committee should be definitively fixed upon a basis of complete equality with the Main Committees of the Assembly.

16. After the conclusion of the general debate on the Special Committee's report and the Norwegian draft resolution and the amendments proposed to it, the Sixth Committee proceeded to a vote. The results of the vote were as follows:

17. Voting section by section on the amendment submitted by Ecuador and Guatemala to the Franco-Brazilian amendment (see paragraph 9(c) above), the Committee adopted by 24 votes to 21, with 3 abstentions, that part of the amendment which proposed the deletion of paragraph 2 of the Norwegian draft resolution.

The part of the amendment which proposed the deletion of paragraph 3 was adopted by 32 votes to 15, with 4 abstentions.

The part of the amendment which proposed the deletion of paragraph 4 was adopted by 31 votes to 6, with 8 abstentions.

18. The amendment submitted by Brazil and France (see paragraph 9(a) above) was then put to the vote. The amendment calling for the replacement of the preamble in the Norwegian draft resolution by the preamble proposed by the two delegations was adopted by 36 votes to 10 with one abstention.

The amendment proposing the insertion of a new paragraph 1 in the operative part of the resolution was adopted by 45 votes to one, with one abstention.

19. Paragraph 1 of the operative part of the Norwegian draft resolution was then adopted by 32 votes to none, with 17 abstentions.
20. The United Kingdom amendment (see paragraph 9(b) above) relating to rule 39 of the rules of procedure was adopted by 31 votes to none, with 18 abstentions.
21. The Norwegian draft resolution as a whole, as so amended, was adopted by 44 votes to none, with 2 abstentions.
22. The Sixth Committee accordingly recommends that the General Assembly adopt the following resolution:

MEASURES TO LIMIT THE DURATION OF REGULAR SESSIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly,

Having regard to General Assembly resolution 689 (VII),

Having regard to the report of the Special Committee on Measures to

Limit the Duration of Regular Sessions of the General Assembly (A/2402),

1. Takes note of the above-mentioned report;
2. (a) Amends rule 38 of its rules of procedure to read as follows:

"The General Committee shall comprise the President of the General Assembly, who shall preside, the seven Vice-Presidents, the Chairman of the six Main Committees and the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Political Committee when one is established. No two members of the General Committee shall be members of the same delegation, and it shall be so constituted as to ensure its representative character. Chairmen of other committees upon which all Members have the right to be represented and which are established by the General Assembly to meet during the session, shall be entitled to attend meetings of the General Committee and may participate without vote in the discussions,";

- (b) Amends the second sentence of rule 39 of its rules of procedure to read as follows:

"A Chairman of a Main Committee or of the Ad Hoc Political Committee shall, in case of absence, designate the Vice-Chairman of the Committee as his substitute";

3. Amends rule 98 of its rules of procedure to read as follows:

"Each Main Committee, taking into account the closing date for the session fixed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the General Committee, shall adopt its own priorities and meet as may be necessary to complete the consideration of the items referred to it."
