

The politics of UN financing – functioning and role of the 5th Committee of the General Assembly

Article 17 of the Charter of the United Nations states that *The General Assembly shall consider and approve the budget of the Organization*. The Article also states that *“the expenses of the Organization shall be borne by the Members as apportioned by the General Assembly”*. These 2 broad provisions are the basis of the work of the 5th Committee of the General Assembly (GA), the main committee of the GA that is responsible for administration and budgetary matters.

The sphere of action of the 5th Committee is very vast. *The 5th* approves the budgets of the UN, takes decisions in the field of construction and renovation of UN buildings (eg Geneva and New York), defines the human resources framework of the Organization and has a key role in the field of Oversight and Audit.

More than anything else, the 5th committee is about UN politics. Unlike other committees of the General Assembly, the 5th Committee is a consensus based committee. Working towards this exhaustive consensus – or the broadest possible agreement - is a unique process in multilateral diplomacy.

The *VVN-lunchlezing* will focus on the multilateral dynamics that are typical of the 5th committee. By negotiating the budgets and administrative procedures of the UN, member states try to influence its programs and functioning. Debates about financing are debates about authority, influence and ultimately control of the organization. The 5th Committee really is about winning arguments in a multilateral room dominated by major blocks (USA, EU, G77+CHINA, Russian Federation). Moreover, the official positions of capitals are often overridden by group dynamics and even the vanities and personal preferences of individual delegates.

The *VVN-lunchlezing* will also focus on the difficult situation the UN is currently facing: member states continue to call upon the Organization while at the same time the major contributors of the UN (USA, JP, FR, UK, DE) are under tight fiscal pressure at home. Members of the Group of 77 and China claim that western countries are putting at risk the proper functioning of the UN if they continue to demand more savings. The western countries claim that the UN can be managed more efficient and effectively. The idea of UN Reform is still very high on the agenda. At the same time the western countries argue that on the basis of their economic growth over the last decade, member states like the Russian Federation, China and Brazil (but also countries like Singapore) could afford to pay more than their drastically discounted rate.

The pressure on the Secretary-General is tremendous as his next program-budget (for the 2014-2015 biennium) will have to be approved before Christmas Eve 2013. Like always, the much sought after consensus will only emerge after marathon negotiations.

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