2008 discharge: EU general budget, Committee of the Regions

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PURPOSE: to present the final annual accounts of the European Communities for the financial year 2008 - Other institutions: section VII - Committee of the Regions.

CONTENT: this document sets out the amount of expenditure and the financial statement of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) for 2008. It presents an analysis of the institution's financial management as well as its main axes of expenditure.

The figures mentioned hereafter are taken from volume I of the Consolidated Annual Accounts of the European Communities for the year 2008:

Commitments

- appropriations authorised: EUR 98 million;
- commitments made in 2008: EUR 81 million (implementation rate of 86.87%);
- appropriations lapsing: EUR 1 million (1.59% of the budget).

Payments

- appropriations authorised: EUR 99 million;
- payments made in 2008: EUR 79 million (implementation rate of 79.38%);
- appropriations lapsing: EUR 3 million (2.99% of the budget).

Main axes of expenditure for 2008 (Committee of the Regions Annual Activity Report 2008): the Committee's mission consists first and foremost of its involvement in the EU decision-making process and policy-orientation debates, as a consultative body, thus ensuring that the concerns and interests of local and regional authorities are effectively taken on board in the framing and implementation of EU law and policies. Two main instruments contribute to this objective: the adoption of the CoR **Opinions**, and the **structured co-operation** with the other institutions and associations of local and regional authorities. The Committee's activities and actions, as well as the annual work programme of its Commissions, are defined on the basis of the overall political strategy of the CoR, set out in the resolution on the political priorities.

Following on to Mr. Delebarre's (PES) Presidency, Mr. Luc Van den Brande (EPP) was elected as President of the Committee of the Regions on 6 February 2008. One of the priorities of his two-year mandate is to step up the Committee's work on the concept of multilevel governance which should contribute to making EU legislation better and easier to identify for the citizen and thus, contribute to a greater acceptance of future EU actions.

The year 2008 was also marked by 5 plenary sessions during which 61 opinions were adopted. Important opinions included:

- the proposal to create a Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM),
- economic and social cohesion,
- common immigration policy,
- EU enlargement,
- the Lisbon Growth and Jobs Strategy,
- European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation,
- fight against terrorism,
- active inclusion and integration policy.

In addition, in 2008 a large number of conferences were held. A major event organised by the CoR together with the European Commission in 2008, along with the seminars organised by the CoR's Commissions, was again the Open Days/European Week of Regions and Cities, held from 6 to 9 October 2008 under the theme "Regions and cities in a challenging world". The event has attracted some 7 400 participants in Brussels. They also served as the launch pad for the 'Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion', which kicked off a major consultation on how to ensure that the European Union's territorial diversity contributes to the sustainable development and prosperity of the European Union as whole.

The following should also be noted: (i) the organisation of a conference on "Territorial Dialogue"; (ii) the pursuit of the Committee of the Regions' Lisbon Monitoring Platform (LMP); (iii) the organisation of a Subsidiarity Conference; (iv) the participation of the Committee in a series of conceptual meetings called Ateliers was launched to develop further the concept of multi-level governance; (v) the continued support to the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

The CoR provided its contribution, in cooperation with the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council, to the setting up of a Euro-Mediterranean forum of local and regional authorities that took place on 22 and 23 June in Marseille

In order to manage and coordinate the above processes the CoR Bureau held 5 ordinary meetings and two external meetings in Brdo (Slovenia) and Dunkirk (France) in 2008.

At the level of the secretariat of the Committee the new cooperation agreement with the European Economic and Social Committee was implemented smoothly allowing not only for a better tailoring of the support services to the political activities but also to a greater accountability of each Committee for the resources it is pooling in the Joint Services. The internal control environment will be enhanced based on best practices.

The other main points concerning the implementation of the CoR budget can be summarised as follows (the CoR 2008 Budget has increased by 6.1% compared to 2007. 25 new posts were obtained in the 2008 Budget bringing the total number of staff to 491 by the end of the year):

Title I *(staff expenditure):* this Title is characterised by a reduction in interpretation services.Savings were made this year since even though the total number meetings – in particular working groups meetings and

seminars, was higher than expected, the interpretation cost per meeting was lower, partially due to the limitation in the number of interpretation languages used to those actually needed by the participants to follow the meeting.

The Title is also marked by the under-utilisation of appropriations for expenditure concerning: (i) expertise; (ii) the crèche (substantial portion of the appropriations is carried over to 2009).

Title II *(operating expenditure):* excess appropriations were identified as regards maintenance and cleaning due to that a new contract "omnium" for the maintenance of installations entered into force in April 2008 instead of January 2008, as originally planned. This has resulted in a lower total expenditure on this item than foreseen. The new "omnium" contract for the maintenance of buildings installations Low than average payment execution rate has also been noted in the following areas:

- energy consumption;
- software systems including maintenance costs (transfer of appropriations to 2009);
- expenditure on publishing, dissemination of information and participation in public events.