General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean GFCM: amending agreement, autonomous budget

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PURPOSE: the acceptance, by the EC, of the amendment to the Agreement of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean establishing an autonomous budget for that Organisation. CONTENT: In the context of the management of fish stocks in the Mediterranean, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) constitutes an essential element, since it is the only multilateral organisation which includes all Coastal States of the Mediterranean. On 16 June 1998, the Council adopted a Decision relating to the accession of the Community to the GFCM. At its meeting of 13-16 October 1997, GFCM had adopted several amendments to the text of the GFCM Agreement. These amendments were of three types: - Permitting regional economic integration organisations to join the GFCM, therefore allowing the accession of the Community to the Organisation; - Reinforcing the Organisation through the creation of a scientific advisory committee and foreseeing annual meetings; - Establishing an autonomous budget. GFCM considers that the first two types of amendment do not represent a 'new obligation' in the sense of Article X.2 of the GFCM Agreement and, consequently, they come into force as from the date of their adoption by GFCM, as laid down in Article X.1 of the said Agreement. These two types of amendments are therefore incorporated in the text accompanying the above-mentioned Council Decision of 16.06.1998. However, the third type of amendment, involving the establishment of an autonomous budget is considered a 'new obligation'. It, therefore, should be subject to the procedure of Article X.2 of the GFCM Agreement, which means that it will come into force after acceptance by two-thirds of GFCM members and, with respect to each member, only on acceptance by that member. The Council Decision of 16 June 1998 did not include the provisions concerning the adoption of the autonomous budget. As the Community has now become a member of the GFCM, it shall accomplish together with the other members the procedure for modifying the Agreement in order to allow for the adoptionj of an autonomous budget. Therefore, the acceptance of this autonomous budget by the EC requires an additional Council Decision. In addition, the acceptance of the autonomous budget for GFCM implies that the Community will provide a financial contribution to that budget; this requires that the declaration of competence and voting rights deposited at the time of the accession of the Community to GFCM, be modified to that effect. The adoption of the autonomous budget is essential for GFCM, according to the Commission. Currently, this organisation depends entirely on the general budget of the FAO. However, the budgetary constraints within FAO limit dramatically the availability of funds for GFCM. This limitation is even more serious taking into account that the structure and functions of GFCM have recently been reinforced. This reinforcement will have no practical effect unless the necessary financial means are provided. For these reasons, the Commission proposes that the Council decide: - that the European Community accept the establishment of anautonomous budget in the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean; - that the declaration of competence and voting rights deposited at the time of the accession of the EC to the GFCM be amended.