Amending budget 1/2003: section VII, Committee of the Regions

2003/2058(BUD) - 31/03/2003 - Commission preliminary draft budget

Since 1997 the Committee of the Regions has carried out a number of initiatives aimed at establishing contacts with the local and regional authorities of the applicant countries and launching an exchange of information which, in some cases, has enabled these authorities to be better informed on the consequences of accession and the measures needing to be taken. Following these first meetings, an ad hoc Bureau group, the CoR/CEEC - Cyprus Liaison Group, was set up in May 1998. The group's main task was to meet local and regional elected representatives from the first-wave applicant countries with a view to establishing regular relations between the CoR and these authorities. In parallel, from 2000 onwards, representatives of the regional and local authorities of the applicant countries attended CoR plenary sessions and commission meetings, making use of the financial resources granted by the budget authority (Article 251 of the CoR budget, Meetings expenses of representatives of the applicant countries). In this context the CoR, like the European Parliament, would like to welcome, from July 2003 onwards, 95 observers from the 10 applicant countries which will be joining the EU as full members in 2004. In April 2002, at the time of adopting its 2003 preliminary draft budget, the CoR was unable to include in the draft budget any significant request concerning the possible participation of representatives of the enlargement countries. This was primarily because the timing of the enlargement had not been decided at that stage, and because the European Parliament had not taken any decision as to how it intended to deal with the same question. It has recently become evident that the European Parliament intends to invite representatives of the accession countries to participate as observers in EP activities in 2003, and the Parliament has at its disposal a reserve fund that it can use for this. For the Committee of the Regions, as a political institution, it is essential to follow a similar approach. It is estimated that an extra sum of approximately EUR 350,000 is needed to be provided for in the CoR 2003 budget. The provisions for the participation of the observers in the plenary sessions would have to be found under heading 251 (Meetings expenses of representatives of the applicant countries).