Black Sea regional policy approach

2007/2101(INI) - 17/01/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Roberta Alma **ANASTASE** (EPP-ED, RO) in response to the Commission's communication on a Black Sea regional approach. The resolution was adopted by 581 votes for, 19 against and 17 abstentions. Parliament welcomes the Communication, and the aim of enhancing cooperation by supplementing the existing bilateral policies with a new regional approach. It notes, in particular, that the energy security issues and the accession negotiations with Turkey, as well as the forthcoming expiry of the PCAs and the negotiations on their future, place regional cooperation in the Black Sea area among the top priorities of the Union's foreign policy agenda. The future development of the Black Sea would benefit greatly from an independent Black Sea strategy in the long term.

The resolution stresses that the Black Sea regional policy approach must be used neither to provide an alternative to EU membership nor to define the frontiers of the EU. Regional cooperation in the Black Sea region should involve the EU, ENP countries, candidate country Turkey and Russia as equal partners. Only by gradually creating a feeling among the Black Sea countries of shared responsibility for the region's common challenges, including security issues, will it be possible to fulfil the full potential of Europe's involvement in the region.

Parliament focuses on the following issues:

Security challenges: the unresolved conflicts persisting in the Black Sea region constitute a major challenge to the stability of the region. Parliament notes the substantial military presence of Russia in the region, and points out that the 1997 agreement between Russia and Ukraine concerning the stationing of the Black Sea fleet expires in 2017. This unresolved matter has already created some friction between the Russian and Ukrainian governments. Parliament encourages the EU to engage in this strategically important issue and to work more closely with the governments of Russia and Ukraine. It urges the Council and the Commission to lower the visa fees to an acceptable level for ordinary citizens of countries participating in the ENP or in a Strategic Partnership with the EU. It also urges the conclusion of visa-facilitation and readmission agreements with those Black Sea countries that do not yet enjoy them, as well as to promote mobility by all other possible means, including the signing of mobility partnerships with ENP countries.

Energy and transport: Parliament reiterates its support for the creation of new infrastructure and viable transport corridors diversifying both suppliers and routes, such as the trans-Caspian/trans-Black Sea energy corridor and the Nabucco, Constana-Trieste and AMBO pipelines, as well as other planned gas and oil transit projects crossing the Black Sea and the INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe) and TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe - Caucasus - Asia) projects connecting the Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions. Emphasising the importance of the Danube as one of the main economic arteries connecting the EU and the Black Sea region, it considers that the sustainable development of the Danube and its economic potential to link the countries surrounding the Black Sea should be among the EU's priorities in the region. Parliament asks the Commission for a study exploring possible concrete initiatives in this respect, including environmental concerns. If full advantage is to be taken of the EU's access to the Black Sea, it will be vital to develop the harbour infrastructures at the EU's Black Sea ports (Bourgas, Constana, Mangalia and Varna) as well as those located at the Danube estuary, with a view to ensuring intermodal transport.

Parliament goes on to state that it is deeply concerned about the **environmental situation** in the Black Sea region, in particular that of the Black Sea, affected by uncontrolled pollution and aggravated by numerous ecological accidents, as well as that of the Danube and its delta.

Economic cooperation: the resolution points out the uneven, albeit strong, economic growth in the entire region, but draws attention to the fact that growth is more sustained in the oil and gas exporting countries. It encourages further liberalisation measures and supports the creation of a free trade area in accordance with WTO principles. MEPs also take into account the significant role of coastal and maritime tourism as a major catalyst for the development of the Black Sea region. They stress the need to develop tourism infrastructure and to encourage diversification of tourism products, making better use of natural resources (e.g. geothermal resources). Facilitation of visa regimes in the neighbourhood will encourage mobility and foster trade and economic activity. The Black Sea Synergy should constitute an adequate framework for promoting the development of tourism in the Black Sea region. Parliament goes on to note inter-regional initiatives such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway project, but stresses that the project bypasses the existing and fully operative rail line in Armenia. It urges the South Caucasus republics and Turkey to pursue effectively **policies of regional economic integration** and to refrain from any short-sighted and politically motivated regional energy and transportation projects which violate ENP principles of sound development.

Institutional aspects: MEPs favour a leading role for the EU Member States of the region and consider that Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, as EU Member States in the Black Sea region, should lead the way. They underline the importance of Russia's and Turkey's positions in the Black Sea region, stating thaty it was important for the success of the Black Sea regional cooperation to involve these countries in a constructive way, alongside all the other rim States. The political dimension of the dialogue and cooperation with and within the Black Sea region should also be further developed.

Financing: MEPs call for a rational use of Community financial instruments through better coordination of the ENPI, the Structural Funds and the pre-accession funds available to the region. They approve the doubling of the financial resources made available under the ENPI for the funding of cross-border projects. The Commission is called upon to make the decentralised financial instrument Small Project Funds available for people-to-people projects in the area of cross-border cooperation and to make special efforts to encourage the use of that instrument.