Strategy for the outermost regions: achievements and future prospects

2008/2010(INI) - 20/05/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 592 votes to 70, with 22 abstentions, a resolution on the strategy for the outermost regions (ORs), in response to the Commission's communication on this issue.

The own initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Margie **SUDRE** (EPP-ED, FR) on behalf of the Committee on Regional Development.

Achievements of the stronger partnership for the ORs: the Parliament notes that the communication offers a particularly favourable assessment of the action taken by the Commission, even though many of the measures it prides itself on only partly address the needs of the ORs (particularly in the fields of transport and accessibility, research, fisheries and regional cooperation), and no reference is made to the problems encountered and efforts made by the ORs, for example, in connection with the renewal of State aid schemes.

MEPs note that Structural Fund intervention continues to play a major role in the development of the ORs. Nevertheless, they would like to see indicators other than merely GDP as compared with the Community average being used to measure the degree of cohesion achieved in these regions. In addition, cohesion policy should be better coordinated with other Community policies across the board, so as to enhance synergies.

The resolution notes the satisfactory results obtained under the specific guidance programmes for remoteness and insularity (POSEI) (agriculture and fisheries) and in the sugar cane, rum and bananas sectors and wishes to see proper consideration given to the financial impact which the ongoing international negotiations may have on these agricultural sectors.

Given the role of ORs in the EU's integrated maritime policy, the Commission is called upon to include in its plan support measures for the fishing industries in these regions.

Fruition stage of the stronger partnership for the ORs: MEPs regret that the proposals put forward by the Commission for the fruition of the partnership mostly concern measures which already exist or are being finalised. They also regret the initial reluctance shown by DG Trade to take into account the specific characteristics of the outermost regions when negotiating Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and urge the Commission to continue to seek compromises that respect the interests of the ORs concerned, when it comes to reaching final agreements with the ACP countries.

The Parliament reiterates the need for the ORs to be given differential treatment in the area of transport, particularly as regards the inclusion of civil aviation in the European Emission Trading Scheme (ETS). Furthermore, MEPs consider that Community interventions should be a catalyst for a spirit of enterprise that will transform the ORs into centres of excellence, driven by sectors which fully exploit their advantages and know-how, such as waste management, renewable energies, energy self-sufficiency, biodiversity, student mobility, research into climate change and crisis management.

An amendment adopted in plenary calls for the efforts made to date concerning the ORs to be pursued in order both to step up the establishment of local research facilities that are equal to their potential and to encourage and help the development of attractive, successful universities, with genuine resources and with standards equal to those of universities in other parts of the Union's territory.

Debate on the future of the Union's strategy for the ORs: MEPs commend the Commission on its initiative in opening a debate on the future of the strategy to assist the outermost regions, the results of which will serve as the basis for drawing up a new proposal by 2009. They stress, nevertheless, that this debate should not be confined to the challenges mentioned (climate change, demographic change and migration management, agriculture, maritime policy).

The Parliament urges that the scope of Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty (in due course Articles 299 and 311 (a) of the Lisbon Treaty), which is the cornerstone of the Union's policy to assist ORs, should be included on the agenda for the debates.

MEPs stress the importance of public services for economic, social and territorial cohesion in the outermost regions, and call for the urgent adoption of measures aimed at combating endemic unemployment, poverty and unequal income distribution. They also believe that the future common immigration policy should devote special attention to the position of ORs, which are all EU external borders. Moreover, the Community support for agriculture in the ORs should be the object of extensive debate with reference to identifying the real challenges, the need to move towards local self-sufficiency and farm income levels.

The Parliament recommends that ways of overcoming the narrowness of local markets, the increasingly open competitive environment, the difficulty of finding market outlets in mainland Europe markets, as well as of improving the coordination of the funding for cooperation projects with neighbouring countries, should also be priorities for debate, together with effective participation by the ORs in European policies to promote innovation and overcome the digital divide.

The Commission, the Council and the other EU institutions concerned are called upon to efficiently, adequately and effectively ensure future Community funding of the Union's strategy to assist ORs and the compensation of handicaps linked to their outermost status.