Regional development aspects of the impact of tourism in coastal regions

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The European Parliament adopted, by 547 votes to 54 with 18 abstentions, a resolution on the regional development aspects of the impact of tourism on coastal regions. The own-initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Jamila **MADEIRA** (PES, PT) on behalf of the Committee on Regional Development.

Parliament recalls that a significant part of the European population lives on the 89 000 km stretch of mainland European coast. Tourism, while typically the main activity in these regions, positively contributing to social and economic development in terms of increasing GDP and employment levels, can also have adverse territorial effects arising from the seasonal nature of activity, employment of unskilled labour, lack of integration between coast and hinterland, lack of economic diversification, or the degradation of the natural and cultural heritage

The EU has six coastal macrozones, namely those corresponding to the Atlantic, the Baltic, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, the North Sea and the outermost regions, each with its particular territorial resources and its specific concept of tourism. In order to support sustainable development, Parliament recommended the following measures :

Counteract the seasonal nature of tourism: MEPs call on coastal Member States to design specific strategies and integrated plans at national and regional level in order to counteract the seasonal nature of tourism in costal regions and ensure more stable employment and a better quality of life for local communities. In this context, the importance of extending the traditional seasonal business to a year-round activity through product diversification and alternative forms of tourism (e.g. business, cultural, medical, sport, agricultural and sea-related tourism) is stressed. According to MEPs, diversification of products and services will help create growth and employment and reduce environmental, economic and social effects.

Integrated approach to coastal tourism: MEPs call for an integrated approach to coastal tourism in the context of the EU's cohesion, maritime, fisheries, environmental, transport, energy, social and health policies, in order to create synergies and avoid inconsistent actions. They recommend that the Commission takes into account such an integrated approach to the sustainable growth of coastal tourism and that a holistic approach to coastal tourism in the context of both its territorial cohesion and its strategy for an integrated maritime policy should be adopted, in particular for the islands, the island Member States, the outermost regions and the other coastal zones, notably in view of the high dependence of these areas on tourism.

Provide sustainable measures: MEPs call on the competent authorities to draw up plans for optimising local infrastructure, for the benefit of both tourists and local residents in order to ensure the reduction of energy use and carbon emissions and improve energy efficiency through the use of renewable energy sources. Mobility chains should be promoted involving local public transport, cycle tracks and footpaths, in particular along cross-border stretches of coastline. The report states that the protection of historical features and archaeological treasures and the preservation of traditions and of cultural heritage in general should be ensured.

Coastal tourism and regional development through the Internet: MEPs calls for a better mobilisation of Structural Funds for coastal regions. They call on the Commission, the Member States and the regions to draw up jointly an exhaustive catalogue, to be made available on the internet, of projects funded in the

coastal zones. A forum should be set up so that interested parties can contact each other and share good practices.

Facing climate change: MEPs point out that coastal regions are particularly affected by the impact of climate change and the attendant rise in sea level and sand erosion, plus the increasing incidence and strength of storms. They insist therefore that coastal regions devise climate change risk and prevention plans. The Commission is called upon, on the one hand, to integrate the EU targets for reducing CO2 emissions into transport and tourism policy and, on the other hand, to promote measures to protect sustainable coastal tourism from the impact of climate change. They emphasise, in this context, the importance of assessing the potential of tourism to contribute to environmental protection and conservation.

Ensure more transparency as regards EU expenditure in the coastal zones: MEPs lament the fact that the current lack of transparency as regards EU expenditure in the coastal zones making it impossible to quantify the level of investment or to analyse the impact of the supported initiatives in those regions. They call on the Commission to activate suitable instruments for making these data available for analytic and statistical purposes and call on the Member States to fulfil their obligations concerning the publication of the final beneficiaries thus providing a comprehensive picture of existing projects. They recommend that the public authorities concerned at national, regional and local level act to promote strategic projects for coastal tourism under their cooperation programmes, providing technical assistance for the preparation of projects, making available suitable levels of funding for such actions and prioritising the use of Structural Funds for developing sustainable, environmentally-friendly tourism in coastal regions, for both Convergence and Competitiveness and Employment areas.

Strengthen urban planning and development: MEPs call on Member States to devise appropriate urban development and planning policies that are compatible with the coastal landscape. The Commission is called upon to ensure that its policy for maritime clusters includes productive services and sectors of relevance to coastal tourism, thus enabling fruitful interaction among those who use the sea as a resource to increase their competitiveness, sustainability and contribution to coastal economic development. The importance of accessibility for the development of coastal regions is highlighted and MEPs call on the Commission, national and regional coastal authorities to develop ways to ensure an optimal connectivity via land, air and waterway transportation.

Special event on coastal tourism: the Commission is called upon to organise at least one special event within the next year, preferably on 20 May, European Maritime Day, focusing on coastal tourism. They stress the need, in developing tourism, of always ensuring the protection of historical features and archaeological treasures and the preservation of traditions and of cultural heritage in general, fostering the active involvement of local communities.