

# Resolution on the European strategy for the economic and social development of mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas

2010/2856(RSP) - 22/09/2010 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 538 votes to 17 with 58 abstentions a resolution on the European strategy for the economic and social development of mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas.

The resolution had been tabled by the EFD, S&D, ALDE, Greens/ALE and EPP groups as well as Elbieta Katarzyna UKACIJEWSKA, Bogusaw SONIK and Jan OLBRYCHT.

It welcomes the inclusion of territorial cohesion as one of the new key objectives established for the EU by the Treaty of Lisbon, aimed at securing the harmonious development of the EU by reducing regional disparities and removing obstacles to development, including obstacles linked to natural and geographical handicaps. In this regard, it also welcomes Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU and believes that the provisions of Article 174 should be translated into specific development strategies and concrete measures aimed at overcoming the handicaps and exploiting the potentials of these regions. Parliament notes that the principle of territorial cohesion was consolidated in the regulations on the Structural Funds 2007-2013.

Recalling that mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas are exposed to particular challenges linked to demographic changes, poor accessibility, climate change, migratory phenomena, energy supply and regional integration, Members consider that these regions constitute homogeneous groups of regions and that they share some important common features which differentiate them from other regions. Parliament believes that they deserve specific regional development programmes; stresses, in this context, the special situation of the island Member States located on the periphery of the Union. It is of the opinion that **GDP must remain the main criterion for determining eligibility for regional policy assistance**. The resolution calls nevertheless on the Commission and Member States to **work towards more pertinent and territorialised statistical indicators**, in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the development level of these disadvantaged regions. It stresses that indicators other than GDP (total population, unemployment/employment rates, education levels, population density) can already be used by Member States in redistributing funds among regions, within their allocated envelopes, taking into account the specific attributes of each region. Members call for the **dropping of the distance-related criterion (150 km)** used for the purpose of classifying islands as border regions eligible for financing under cross-border cooperation programmes coming under the cohesion policy Territorial Cooperation Objective or the European Neighbourhood Policy. They believe that, if it is necessary to establish some kind of limit, it would be more appropriate, in the case of island regions, for the cross-border territory condition to be applied at maritime basin level.

Parliament calls for the establishment of a **specific European integrated and flexible policy framework** for dealing with mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas on the basis of their shared features, while also taking proper account of different situations and showing due regard for the principle of proportionality. It states that cohesion policy should address the situation of the islands not just through regional policy measures, but also using other EU policies that have a significant territorial impact on the development of these regions: a European policy framework for mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas may have the added value required in order to overcome the permanent handicaps of these regions and adapt their development model in such a way as to make good use of their assets.

Parliament calls on Member States and regional and local authorities to play a major role in the development strategies of mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas, because a vertical approach involving all levels of government is required in order to place these regions on the right path towards sustainable development, taking into consideration other important sectors in each region. The potential within these regions, many of which have very substantial natural resources, can make a positive contribution towards achieving the goals, especially in the fields of energy policy and R&D, set out in the EU2020 strategy. Members stress that the objective of economic and social development in these handicapped regions can be achieved only through carefully devised EU programmes and actions specifically adapted to each region and aimed at achieving a structural adjustment of these regions and making them more competitive and capable of coping with the main challenges facing them, and also through efficient coordination and implementation of the four Structural Funds, the Cohesion Fund and other financial instruments, such as those provided by the European Investment Bank.

The resolution welcomes European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) as an instrument aimed at overcoming the obstacles to territorial cooperation. It encourages mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas to make use of EGTCs for the management of territorial cooperation projects with other regions that are cofinanced by the EU, as a way of bringing them closer to their surrounding economic areas. It also encourages Member States to make full use of the European Neighbourhood Policy instruments in mountain areas, sparsely populated areas and islands, so as to enable them to benefit from the resources available across borders.

Lastly, Parliament calls on the Commission and Member States to ensure that mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas will continue to benefit from specific provisions under the new multiannual financial framework and during the next programming period.