Resolution on the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

2011/2532(RSP) - 17/02/2011 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 14 February 2011, the European Parliament adopted, by 549 votes to 41, with 18 abstentions a resolution on the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

The resolution had been tabled by the EPP, S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA, ECR and GUE/NGL groups.

It welcomes the approval by the Commission of the Strategy for the Danube Region and the Action Plan accompanying and recalls that the European Parliament has been calling for this strategy since 2008. The Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Council are asked to endorse the EU Strategy for the Danube Region by the June European Council and to start its implementation as quickly as possible. Members stress that the **major added value of EU macro-regional strategies is seen in multi-level cooperation, coordination and better strategic investments using the available funding, not in additional allocation of resources**. They underline the conclusions of the Swedish Presidency regarding no new institutions, no new legislation, no new budgets. Member States are asked to take advantage of the Structural Funds available for 2007-2013 in order to ensure maximum support for the Strategy, in particular to promote job creation and economic growth in areas most affected by the economic crisis. They also recommend making provision for changes to the Operational Programmes in the current programming period where justified. Exploiting the particular characteristics of regions could lead to much more effective use of the Structural Funds and the creation of added value at regional level.

Members feel that the enlargement of the EU as well as major trans-national challenges such as the economic crisis, environmental threats, sustainable transport, energy connectivity, resource sustainability and the ecological use of water resources show that the interdependence of individual states is on the rise, sectoral thinking is no longer appropriate and in this context the establishment of macro-regions opens up new, more efficient perspectives for multi-level cooperation. They also state that the Danube Strategy, if supported by a strong political commitment, could represent a **significant contribution to overcoming past divisions in Europe** and thus fulfilling the vision of EU integration, giving a new impetus to sustainable growth, not only within the limits of Central and South-Eastern Europe, but also in a much wider geographical context. The Strategy represents an excellent opportunity for the entire Union to fortify its political and economic cooperation with the Balkans, and, as a consequence, to contribute to the expansion and consolidation of the process of European integration in the region.

Parliament urges governments to facilitate measures to enable pro-active participation by NGOs, trade associations and civil society, with due regard also for women's networks and minority groups. It recommends increasing the local communities' involvement by setting up wider and more focused communication and consultation tools, including through the local media (local television, radio and printed and online newspapers). Members suggest a special web portal devoted to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, which would act as a forum for the exchange of experiences regarding current and future projects undertaken by central and local government, NGOs and other entities active in the Danube region.

The resolution considers that the successful implementation of the EU Danube Strategy depends on the ability of municipal actors to intervene on regional labour markets with project initiatives triggering local

demand for labour. It draws attention to the disproportion in terms of economic development and innovation that exists in the Danube region and the necessity to increase the potential of all areas, including the highly developed ones, as they can help in pulling forward the least advantaged regions.

It points out that from an ecological point of view Central and South-Eastern Europe is one of the richest but at the same time one of the most vulnerable areas of Europe. Parliament calls for improvements to the ecological status of the Danube, and for measures to reduce pollution and to prevent further releases of oil and other toxic and harmful substances. A good ecological status of the Danube is a prerequisite for all human activity along the river and Parliament recommends that the environmental targets should be particularly considered. Members stress the importance of promoting a green economy, green innovation and in a larger sense research and innovation aiming at the emergence of a new, competitive low-carbon economy. They also underline the importance of promoting sustainable tourism in the region.

Parliament goes on to call on the Commission and Member States to improve the infrastructure and economic performance of the Danube region and complete the implementation of TEN-T projects in a speedy and environmentally sustainable way, and makes several recommendations regarding waterway development. It also stresses the need to encourage the enhancement of the Danube's cultural environment.

Lastly, Members call on the Commission to regularly inform and consult the European Parliament on the status of implementation and updating of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region as well as on EU-funded projects relating to the Danube region.