Optimise the potential of outermost regions by creating synergies between the EU structural funds and other EU programmes

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The European Parliament adopted by 446 votes to 73, with 47 abstentions, a resolution on optimising the potential of outermost regions (ORs) by creating synergies between the Structural Funds and other European Union programmes.

Members are convinced that the assets, resources and potential of the ORs highlighted by the European Commission, which lie in areas of key importance to EU research, innovation and growth, **attract too little support and financing under EU funds and programmes**. They deplored the approach advocated at European level whereby the cohesion policy alone should be used to finance virtually all OR development projects.

Stressing the importance of encouraging long-term investments and promoting innovation in the ORs, Parliament considered that the volume of **structural and investment funding** being provided to the ORs must be **adjusted or supplemented** in order to enable them to address the major challenges facing the EU.

With regards to meeting the objectives the EU has set as part of the Europe 2020 growth strategy, the Horizon 2020 strategy, the Energy 2020 strategy, the LIFE+ and Natura 2000 programmes and the trans-European telecommunications, transport and energy networks, the ORs are **regions of excellence** making a significant contribution towards the realisation of the objectives.

It is for this reason that the resolution foresees the **creation of the closest possible synergies between all EU instruments, funds and programmes in the following areas**:

Research and innovation: the Commission should make the necessary adjustments and guarantee OR access to the Horizon 2020 programme by setting up dedicated programmes that can help to foster greater OR inclusion in European and international research and innovation networks. Members supported the further development of universities in the Ors.

Internal market: the Commission is called upon to look into the issue of the additional costs and high cost of living in the ORs and to take this issue into account when shaping European policies and to enforce the competition rules more strictly in order to guard against monopolies and cartels in the Ors.

Environment and energy: Members believed that the ORs' potential in the areas of biodiversity management, conservation and rehabilitation, adaptation to climate change and renewable energy development can be maximised through the establishment of synergies and cross-funding arrangements between cohesion policy, the LIFE+ programme and the Energy 2020 strategy.

Youth: Parliament highlighted the need for greater synergies to be achieved between the Erasmus programme and the ESF in the ORs, in order to maximise local human capital and expertise. It called for further action on the employment front in the form of an **urgent pilot plan to combat unemployment** in the ORs. The resolution called for special youth employment action teams to be set up in the Commission, with a view to implementing the Youth Guarantee scheme and mobilising the ESF and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).

Trans-European network (transport, telecommunications, energy): Members recalled that accessibility plays a key role where the development of the ORs is concerned and that the digital divide between the ORs and mainland Europe is hampering the ORs' development and competitiveness. They stressed therefore the need for synergies to be created in the ORs between the trans-European networks, the Connecting Europe Facility, the Civitas and Horizon 2020 programmes and ERDF and Cohesion Fund funding for transport, telecommunications and energy projects.

EU Maritime policy: recalling that the ORs contribute towards the EU's status as a world maritime power, the resolution stated that the lack of synergies between cohesion policy and the Common Fisheries Policy, which still takes too little account of conditions in the ORs. Parliament stressed the importance of **maintaining a POSEI scheme for fisheries**, and proposed that research and innovation should be stepped up in the maritime economy, as they are a potential source of growth.

Agriculture: Members pointed to the need to ensure that POSEI has the necessary resources to help OR producers to cope with the impact of the liberalisation of a number of sectors resulting from EU policies and international agreements concluded in the milk, sugar, rum, meat and banana sectors in particular. They believed that **synergies should be created between cohesion policy and the EAFRD** with a view to modernising and extending irrigation networks and for the purposes of spatial planning, training and capitalising on the tourism potential of sustainable agriculture and rural communities;

Combat against poverty and social exclusion: Members drew attention to the fact that a number of fundamental problems exist in the ORs, one of them being social exclusion. They advocated the establishment of a **social housing** investment scheme and the introduction of special measures under which aid in support of investment in social housing is not considered to be State aid.

External policy: Members deplored the continued lack of a proper linkage between the European funds EDF, ERDF and ETC, in particular in cross-border cooperation projects, despite the fact that this is essential if the funds' objectives are to be met.

The Commission is called upon to **take greater account of the impact that trade agreements concluded with non-EU countries have on OR economies**, with impact studies being conducted in advance of each agreement in order to ensure that any 'sensitive' products are protected and fair compensation is provided for any losses incurred in specific sectors. A procedure for consulting OR regional authorities should also be introduced.