Resolution on the special situation of islands

2015/3014(RSP) - 04/02/2016 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution, tabled by the Committee on Regional Development, on the special situation of islands.

The economic crisis has impacted dramatically on the national and regional budgets of many Member States by limiting the availability of financing in many sectors and leading to a 20 % collapse of public investment. The impact of the crisis has seriously affected the potential development of many disadvantaged regions, including islands.

EU islands are also **peripheral regions** situated in some cases on the EU's external borders and are **particularly vulnerable to the challenges which Europe is currently facing**, such as globalisation, demographic trends, climate change, energy supply and, especially for the southern areas, exposure to increasing migration flows.

Remedy island region handicaps: Parliament encouraged the Commission to:

- provide a **clear definition** of the type of geographical, natural and demographic permanent handicaps that insular regions can suffer from;
- state **how it intends to implement the wording of Article 174 of the TFEU** regarding the permanent handicaps of insular regions that hinder their natural development and prevent them from achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Recalling that certain handicaps are more difficult to cope with for islands, Parliament called on the Commission to:

- launch an in-depth study/analysis on the extra costs incurred as a result of being islands, in terms of the transport system for people and goods, energy supply and access to markets, in particular for SMEs;
- set up a **homogeneous group made up of all island territories** on the basis of Article 174 of the TFEU, which recognises the special situation of islands.

The resolution insisted on the need:

- for **better connectivity** through maritime routes, improved access to ports and better air transport services; considers that particular emphasis should be placed on transport hubs, inter-modal transport and sustainable mobility;
- to support **balanced territorial development** of island regions by promoting innovation and competiveness in these regions, which are remote from the major administrative and economic centres and do not benefit from ease of access to transport, and by strengthening local production for local markets;
- invest in infrastructure in order to ensure **broadband** access on islands and the full participation of islands in the digital single market;
- provide **education** at all levels, where necessary also by making more use of distance education systems.

Exploit the potential of the islands: Parliament emphasised that islands benefit from a territorial potential: (i) the development of sustainable tourism in addition to seasonal tourism, focusing on the promotion of cultural heritage and specific artisanal economic activities; (ii) the huge potential of ocean, wind and solar energy and the potential of islands to become important sources of alternative energy.

It stressed, in this connection, the importance of using all possible synergies between the **European Structural and Investment Funds** and other Union instruments with a view to counterbalancing the handicaps of islands.

The Commission is called upon to:

- establish an '**EU Strategic Framework for Islands**' with a view to linking up instruments that can have a major territorial impact;
- establish an '**islands desk'** linked to the Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) and made up of a small group of officials in order to coordinate and analyse issues relating to island regions;
- submit a communication containing an '**Agenda for EU Islands'** and, subsequently, a White Paper to monitor the development of islands, based on best practice and involving local, regional and national authorities and other relevant actors, including economic and social partners and representatives of civil society;
- propose a **European Year** of Islands and Mountains.

Lastly, Parliament recalled that **many islands in the Mediterranean have seen huge numbers of migrants arriving** and are having to deal with this situation and stressed the need for a holistic EU approach, which should include EU support and a joint effort by all Member States.