Connectivity and EU-Asia relations

2020/2115(INI) - 21/01/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 526 votes to 43, with 119 abstentions, a resolution on connectivity and EU-Asia relations.

Members noted that considerable economic potential between Europe, Asia and other continents remains untapped owing to a lack of physical and digital infrastructure. The importance of an effective EU Connectivity Strategy has been further underscored by the COVID-19 pandemic, which made both the weaknesses and strengths of the European and global connectivity networks clear to see.

Principles of the Connectivity Strategy

Parliament encouraged the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to develop an EU Global Connectivity Strategy, which would be an extension of the current EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy. This strategy would strengthen the EU's role as a key geopolitical and geo-economic actor and set the conditions for Europe to cooperate with other countries bilaterally and multilaterally to promote fiscally, economically, socially and environmentally sustainable connectivity.

The Strategy should comprehensively address a broad spectrum of political, economic, cultural, sustainability and security dimensions based on the EU’s fundamental values.

Members invited all European countries to join the EU’s Connectivity Strategy, including countries in the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the Western Balkans and the European Neighbourhood, and to functionally integrate the different developing regions. The UK is also encouraged to join forces with the EU in promoting strategic international connectivity.

Governance of the Strategy

The Strategy should be monitored and coordinated with the pursuit of internal connectivity within the EU and between the EU and its prospective members, such as through the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) or the Three Seas Initiative, strengthening shared values, standards and interests, and providing shared ownership of the Strategy for EU institutions and the Member States.

Parliament proposed to open a regular dialogue on the implementation of the strategy within the Commissioners’ Group for a stronger Europe, which would act as a coordinating body for connectivity. In addition, Parliament, Council, Member States and national parliaments should all be involved in the strategy. The Commission should produce regular progress reports on the implementation of the strategy.

European and Member States’ development banks, investment agencies and export credit agencies should play a central role in managing investment in international connectivity projects.

For the Strategy to be credible, it needs to be equipped with the necessary tools and means to implement it on a scale that matches its ambition. Adequate public resources should be allocated under the 2021-2027 MFF.

Strategy’s priorities

The Strategy should also be clearly focused on a definitive set of priorities such as, inter alia: green transition, transport, digital transformation; health, trade, investment and security.

Connectivity partnerships

Parliament welcomed the establishment of the EU-Japan Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure, with its focus on sustainable connectivity with the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Indo-Pacific and Africa. It also welcomed the ongoing negotiations to establish a connectivity partnership with India. It expressed support for a connectivity partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Both Russia and Turkey also have interests in becoming stakeholders in EU-Asia connectivity. Members are willing to partner with them where possible. They regretted however that projects funded by China in Central Asia lack transparency.

Members considered that the EU should strengthen cooperation with the US.

Global connectivity

Parliament strongly emphasised the fact that the Strategy must pay particular attention to connectivity with the European Neighbourhood and with the neighbouring continent of Africa, given its increasingly geopolitical relevance for several global actors.

Lastly, the Commission should present a new communication approach with a clear narrative in order to create adequate visibility and sufficient accountability for EU connectivity policies and their results.