Assessment of the new communication of the European Commission on Outermost Regions

2022/2147(INI) - 13/06/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 589 votes to 22, with 16 abstentions, a resolution on the assessment of the new Commission communication on outermost regions.

While welcoming the visible progress achieved by the EU strategies for the ORs, Members regretted, nevertheless, the lack of commitment shown by the Commission in this new strategy in essential areas for the ORs, in particular as regards **boosting their competitiveness** in order to reinforce the EU's position as a major oceanic player.

Better application of Article 349 TFEU

Members believe that Article 349 TFEU has been used in a limited way and could be interpreted in a more innovative and positive way, in particular with a view to creating ad hoc programmes and new specific policies. This article should be **applied across the board to EU policies and initiatives**. Members insisted on the need to preserve the current specific status of the ORs.

According to Parliament, the EU should show greater ambition in deepening its integrated policies for the ORs, adopting a voluntary and coherent approach and providing strong support for the sustainable endogenous development of each of these regions. The Commission should **extend the POSEI model to other economic sectors in the ORs**, with priority given to fisheries, transport, connectivity, energy and the digital transition. These specific measures are essential to encourage progress towards sustainable green and blue economies in the ORs.

Members called on the Commission to provide the OR strategy with an action plan and consider that it should be allocated specific and sufficient financial resources, take account of the characteristics, strengths and difficulties of each OR and define an individual action plan for each OR, if they so request. The **action plan** should be based on a bottom-up approach and a multi-level governance framework. The impact of the current crisis in the ORs must be taken into account in the revision of the 2021-2027 MFF.

Reaffirming the need to reassess state aid rules for OR businesses, Members called on the Commission not to count as state aid compensation for insularity and remoteness, particularly in the field of transport. They stressed the importance of ensuring the continuity of all existing tax regimes in the outermost regions.

Social and human development

Recalling that the rates of people at risk of poverty in the ORs are among the highest in the Union, Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to do their utmost to **guarantee access to essential services in these regions**, this being a key factor in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

Members believe it is necessary to take measures to promote and support the installation of teachers, particularly those teaching **science, technology, engineering and mathematics** (STEM), who play an important role in the twin transition, to enable the acquisition of skills in these areas and to stimulate young people's interest in these subjects. They deplored the levels of unemployment, school drop-out and poverty in the ORs, which are in an extremely fragile situation compared with other EU territories,

exacerbated by the current context of multiple and complex crises, which calls for greater European solidarity.

The resolution stressed that the **social situation of young people** is a central concern in the ORs and welcomes the Commission's commitment to using the ESF+ to improve education, training, mobility and employment for young people.

The Commission is invited to put in place specific actions on training, apprenticeships, skills development and conversion in these regions. Members stressed the need to define strategies to combat the brain drain and increase the attractiveness of the ORs, particularly for young people, to guarantee gender equality and the social, economic and political empowerment of women in the ORs, and to ensure the proper implementation of the European Child Guarantee.

There is also a need for a thorough evaluation of the national policies and support programmes that have been deployed in the ORs to **mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment**, in order to identify effective instruments that can be maintained or used in the future.

Ocean governance and the potential of the blue economy in the ORs

Parliament called on the Commission to make the outermost regions the **European Union's benchmark** for ocean governance, the blue economy and fisheries. It stressed the need to continue investing in the **modernisation of the fishing fleet**, in particular the traditional artisanal fishing fleet, in order to improve the safety and working conditions of fishermen, attract new people, in particular young people, to the fishing sector, reduce CO2 emissions and improve conditions for the storage and conservation of catches. It urged the Commission and the Member States to work together more effectively to rapidly release funding for the renewal of fishing fleets in the outermost regions.

Agriculture, one of the pillars of development in the ORs

Parliament has called for a significant **increase in the current allocations** for the POSEI scheme for agriculture, in particular the aid provided by the specific supply arrangements, as part of the mid-term review of the multiannual financial framework or the multiannual financial framework for the post-2027 period, in order to better support local production in the outermost regions in the face of rising additional costs and to strengthen and increase the resilience of supply chains, but also to support agricultural diversification efforts, in order to help the outermost regions achieve greater food self-sufficiency.

The outermost regions are frequently subject to **adverse climatic events** which lead to higher production costs and prevents economies of scale from being made. Members urged the Commission, in order to meet these challenges, to grant coupled support to local producers to strengthen the whole value chain in such difficult situations.

Mobility, transport and tourism

Parliament supports the creation of a **specific financial operational programme for transport and connectivity** in the outermost regions, a ‘POSEI transport programme’, similar to the POSEI programme for agriculture and additional to the Structural Funds, to offset the additional costs arising from remoteness and/or insularity. It stressed the importance of this programme for the outermost regions, as in the case of the Azores archipelago, which suffers from ‘double insularity’ due to its distance from the mainland and the distance between the islands.

Members reiterated the need to work towards the development of **efficient public transport systems** in the outermost regions that are adapted to local conditions. They stressed the importance of developing resilient and sustainable tourism and of launching new measures to promote the revival of the tourism

sector in the outermost regions, paying particular attention to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the regions most dependent on tourism.

Action on climate, biodiversity, energy independence and renewable energies

Parliament stressed that targeted regional policies and actions to protect the ecosystems of the outermost regions and restore their unique and exceptionally rich biodiversity are necessary to preserve their natural resources and livelihoods. It reiterated the need to **continue and improve measures to protect and restore biodiversity** and called for the specific situation of the outermost regions to be taken into account in the regulation on nature restoration.

Stressing the vulnerability of the outermost regions to the effects of climate and geological change, in particular extreme weather and seismic events, Members regretted that the annual ceiling of the **Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve's** annual ceiling is not sufficient to respond to emergencies, particularly in the outermost regions.

Parliament recalled the potential of the outermost regions for the development of innovative renewable energy pilot projects. It called for the Modernisation Fund to be applied to the outermost regions to **address the energy poverty** endured these extremely vulnerable regions.

The Commission is also invited, *inter alia*, to:

- assure the Member States of its support in order to ensure the rapid use of all funding opportunities for infrastructure and **digital connectivity**;

- support the development of **health systems** and access to care, and develop e-health solutions to help remedy the shortages of health professionals and the insufficient digitisation of health systems;

- better support national plans to **relaunch space activities**, which are a major source of innovation and European sovereignty, given the privileged location and infrastructure available in certain outermost regions for space activities;

- grant **preferential treatment to products from the outermost regions**, both in their local markets and EU market, to fully protect sensitive agricultural products, such as bananas, tomatoes, sugar and milk, when negotiating free trade and economic partnership agreements, and to ensure that imports from third countries comply with EU standards.