Stronger partnership for the outermost regions

2004/2253(INI) - 28/09/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Sérgio **MARQUES** (EPP-ED, PT) on a stronger partnership for the outermost regions. (Please see the summary of 12/07/2005.) Parliament called on the Commission to carry out an assessment of the impact of the Community legislation liable to have implications for the outermost regions, and also called for the special situation of the outermost regions to be properly taken into account at all levels of implementation of Community policies and actions.

Financial perspective and cohesion policy: Parliament asked the Commission to ensure, whether under the specific programme to compensate for additional costs or under the wider neighbourhood action plan, or where access in general to Structural Funds is concerned, that equal treatment continues in measures concerning the outermost regions. It strongly supported the special action of EUR 1 100 million for the outermost regions proposed by the Commission, as well as the possibility of financing operating aid. There must be full practical expression given to the requirement laid down in the EC Treaty for the outermost regions to be treated as a special case as regards their access to the Structural Funds, including those regions whose GDP has already risen above 75% of the Community average.

Agriculture and fisheries: In the context of the future rules of the EAFRD, the Commission must take account of the specific circumstances of the outermost regions, allocating them sufficient financial resources to attain the rural development policy objectives and preserving uniform treatment for those regions when setting the Fund's contribution rates, on lines similar to those of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF). Parliament deplored the abolition of sales aid for the sugar sector. This must be restored and there should be full compensation for loss of income in order genuinely to take account of the specific handicaps suffered by the outermost regions. Moreover, it is essential to ensure that sugar production and refining in the Azores are given access to the national market under conditions equivalent to those in force before the incorporation of this region in the EU, in the same way as has been the case with the Canary islands, without compromising the pursuit of this activity in the region.

In view of the particular circumstances of the exclusive economic zones of the outermost regions (absence of a continental shelf in certain cases) and the limitations of their fisheries zones (often confined to submarine hills), the Commission is asked to apply the precautionary principle and the principle of relative stability, thereby helping ensure not only biological and ecological balance for the species concerned, but also the protection of the socio-economic fabric related to the fisheries sector in those regions.

Competition and state aids: Parliament hoped, as regards state aid for regional purposes, that the outermost regions can continue to receive non-degressive operating aid, not limited in time, and that the aid can be extended to cover the transport sector, provided that the public procurement rules guarantee fair price-setting by the undertakings concerned. It also hoped that the outermost regions can continue to benefit from a higher rate over and above the amount of initial investment aid. Movable transport assets should be included among eligible costs as regards initial investment. Parliament hoped also that it will be permitted to compensate outermost regions for the additional costs incurred in transporting goods within the EU market.

Services of general economic interest: The Commission should act on its promise for a working party to study the operation of services of general economic interest in the outermost regions and draw up proposals geared to the special features and needs of those regions where the market in public services is concerned.

Taxation and customs measures: Parliament called on the Commission to show willingness to consider requests from outermost regions for temporary suspension of Common Customs Tariff duties levied on supplies of non-agricultural commodities for production uses and of fishery products, and on imported capital goods for business and industrial use.

Environment: This area must not be neglected in future measures in support of the outermost regions, since resources are insufficient to meet continuing needs regarding the environment, specifically as regards the protection of biodiversity, implementation of the Natura 2000 network, and waste management. This makes it more difficult to pursue an environmental policy in the outermost regions which is consistent with the fundamental principles of Community environmental policy. Parliament called on the Commission to implement measures along the lines of the environment component of the Programme of options specific to the remote and insular nature of Madeira and the Azores (POSEIMA).

Transport: Transport projects financed by the Community in the outermost regions must bring about improvements first and foremost to the quality of life of the inhabitants and the self-contained development of those regions. Projects developed in breach of Community environmental law must be halted. Parliament recommended that all transport projects developed for the outermost regions must have a precise and clearly-defined analysis of the benefits for the diversification of the local economy, social cohesion and the sustainability of the regional job market.