

P7_TA(2010)0341

European strategy for the economic and social development of mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas

European Parliament resolution of 22 September 2010 on the European strategy for the economic and social development of mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Part III, Title XVIII of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and in particular to Article 174 thereof,
- having regard to the regulations governing the Structural Funds for the period 2007-2013,
- having regard to the Council Decision 2006/702/EC of 6 October 2006 on Community strategic guidelines on cohesion¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 2 September 2003 on structurally disadvantaged regions (islands, mountain regions, regions with low population density) in the context of cohesion policy, and their institutional prospects²,
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 7 July 2005 on the revision of the guidelines for regional State aids³,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 March 2007 on the islands and natural and economic constraints in the context of the regional policy⁴,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 6 October 2008 entitled 'Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion - Turning territorial diversity into strength' (COM(2008)0616),
- having regard to the Commission staff working document entitled 'Regions 2020 - an assessment of future challenges for EU regions' (SEC(2008)2868),
- having regard to its resolution of 24 March 2009 on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion and the state of the debate on the future reform of cohesion policy⁵,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 25 June 2009 on the Sixth Progress Report on Economic and Social Cohesion (COM(2009)0295),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 31 March 2010 entitled 'Cohesion policy: Strategic Report 2010 on the implementation of the programmes 2007-2013' (COM(2010)0110),

¹ OJ L 291, 21.10.2006, p. 11.

² OJ C 76 E, 25.3.2004, p. 111.

³ OJ C 31, 7.2.2006, p. 25.

⁴ OJ C 301 E, 13.12.2007, p. 244.

⁵ OJ C 117 E, 6.5.2010, p. 65.

- having regard to Rule 110(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the principle of territorial cohesion was consolidated in the regulations on the Structural Funds 2007-2013 and is one of the new key objectives established for the European Union by the Treaty of Lisbon, aimed at securing the harmonious development of the EU by reducing regional disparities and removing obstacles to development, including obstacles linked to natural and geographical handicaps,
- B. whereas it is important to clarify the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on the status of regions deserving particular measures in the framework of regional policy,
- C. whereas, in keeping with Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, particular attention shall be paid to regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps, such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions,
- D. whereas mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas are exposed to particular challenges linked to demographic changes, poor accessibility, climate change, migratory phenomena, energy supply and regional integration,
 1. Welcomes the inclusion of territorial cohesion as a new objective of the Union, as well as new Article 174; believes that the provisions of Article 174 should be translated into specific development strategies and concrete measures aimed at overcoming the handicaps and exploiting the potentials of these regions;
 2. Considers that mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas constitute homogeneous groups of regions and that they share some important common features which differentiate them from other regions; believes that they deserve specific regional development programmes; stresses, in this context, the special situation of the island Member States located on the periphery of the Union;
 3. Is of the opinion that GDP must remain the main criterion for determining eligibility for regional policy assistance; calls nevertheless on the Commission and the Member States to work towards more pertinent and territorialised statistical indicators, in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the development level of these disadvantaged regions; stresses that indicators other than GDP (total population, unemployment/employment rates, education levels, population density) can already be used by the Member States in redistributing funds among regions, within their allocated envelopes, taking into account the specific attributes of each region;
 4. Calls for the establishment of a specific European integrated and flexible policy framework for dealing with mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas on the basis of their shared features, while also taking proper account of different situations and showing due regard for the principle of proportionality; is of the opinion that cohesion policy should address the situation of the islands not just through regional policy measures, but also using other EU policies that have a significant territorial impact on the development of these regions; believes that a European policy framework for mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas may have the added value required in order to overcome the permanent handicaps of these regions and adapt their development model in such a way as to make good use of their assets;

5. Calls on Member States and regional and local authorities to play a major role in the development strategies of mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas, because a vertical approach involving all levels of government, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, is required in order to place these regions on the right path towards sustainable development, taking into consideration other important sectors in each region; stresses that the potential within these regions, many of which have very substantial natural resources, can make a positive contribution towards achieving the goals, especially in the fields of energy policy and R&D, set out in the EU2020 strategy;
6. Stresses that the objective of economic and social development in these handicapped regions can be achieved only through carefully devised EU programmes and actions specifically adapted to each region and aimed at achieving a structural adjustment of these regions and making them more competitive and capable of coping with the main challenges facing them, and also through efficient coordination and implementation of the four Structural Funds, the Cohesion Fund and other financial instruments, such as those provided by the European Investment Bank;
7. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas will continue to benefit from specific provisions under the new multiannual financial framework and during the next programming period;
8. Welcomes European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) as an instrument aimed at overcoming the obstacles to territorial cooperation; encourages mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas to make use of EGTCs for the management of territorial cooperation projects with other regions that are cofinanced by the EU, as a way of bringing them closer to their surrounding economic areas;
9. Encourages the Member States to make full use of the European Neighbourhood Policy instruments in mountain areas, sparsely populated areas and islands, so as to enable them to benefit from the resources available across borders;
10. Calls for the dropping of the distance-related criterion (150 km) used for the purpose of classifying islands as border regions eligible for financing under cross-border cooperation programmes coming under the cohesion policy Territorial Cooperation Objective or the European Neighbourhood Policy; believes that, if it is necessary to establish some kind of limit, it would be more appropriate, in the case of island regions, for the cross-border territory condition to be applied at maritime basin level;
11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council, the national, regional and local governments of the Member States and the economic and social partners.