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REPORT

on the strategy for the outermost regions: achievements and future prospects
(2008/2010(INI))

Committee on Regional Development

Rapporteur: Margie Sudre

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the strategy for the outermost regions: achievements and future prospects (2008/2010(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the communication from the Commission of 12 September 2007, 'Strategy for the outermost regions: achievements and future prospects' (COM(2007)0507) and the communications of 12 May 2004 (COM(2004)0343) and 23 August 2004 (COM(2004)0543) on a stronger partnership for the outermost regions,
 - having regard to Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty, which will be replaced by Articles 349 and 355 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, concerning the special characteristics of the outermost regions, and Article 107(3)(a) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
 - having regard to paragraph 60 of the Presidency conclusions of the European Council in Brussels on 14 December 2007,
 - having regard to the final declaration of the Thirteenth Conference of Presidents of the Outermost Regions in Madeira on 5 October 2007,
 - having regard to its resolutions of 2001 and 2005 on the outermost regions,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development and the opinion of the Committee on Fisheries (A6-0158/2008),
- A. whereas the Azores, the Canaries, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Madeira, Martinique and Reunion are characterised by a combination of permanent and severe handicaps, including their remoteness from the European mainland, their insularity or inaccessibility, their difficult topography and climate and the smallness of their markets,
- B. whereas Saint-Martin and Saint Barthélemy, which are administratively and politically separate from Guadeloupe, are named as new outermost regions (ORs) in Articles 349 and 355 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (EC Treaty, as amended by the Treaty of Lisbon),
- C. having regard to the structure of the economies of the outermost regions, marked by close links with agriculture and fisheries, which, together with services (particularly tourism), are economic activities which account for a very large number of jobs in these regions,
- D. having regard to the ORs' dependent situation, in social and economic terms, with regard to the fish stocks in their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and to the biological vulnerability of their fishing zones,
- E. whereas the immediate geographical environment of the outermost regions offers very

limited market opportunities, while the markets of these regions are highly attractive to all neighbouring third countries,

- F. whereas the ORs are totally dependent on transport links and whereas the additional costs relating to the transport of persons and goods, inadequate services in terms of frequency or coverage, high fares, and the difficulties in setting up or maintaining regional transport services are major obstacles in the way of the economic development and accessibility of ORs,
- G. whereas, during the last three years, the ORs have been directly affected by major Community reforms, including the financial perspective, regional policy 2007-2013, the EFF, the EAFRD, State aids, the COM in sugar and bananas and the POSEI schemes for agriculture and fisheries, and whereas these changes have frequently had serious effects on these regions,
- H. whereas the Union's political priorities, which must remain consistent with the ever more binding international commitments dictated by globalisation, particularly within the WTO, frequently run counter to the specific measures taken to assist the ORs,
- I. whereas the relative influence of the ORs has declined substantially in a Union that has grown from 12 to 27 Member States,
- J. whereas the image of ORs, often seen as regions subsidised by Community or regional funds, without consideration for the positive impact of such funding, is hardly offset by the genuine added value they contribute to the Union in environmental, cultural and geostrategic terms and as regards space research, which is not immediately visible,
- K. whereas the ORs are vital footholds for Europe in the heart of the Caribbean, in the neighbourhood of the Mercosur countries, and off the coast of Africa in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, making the Union one of the world's largest maritime areas, with EEZs totalling 25 million km², containing a wealth of resources of all kinds,

Achievements of the stronger partnership for the ORs

1. Welcomes the fact that, three years after the publication of the highly ambitious political positions contained in the aforementioned communications on a 'stronger partnership for the outermost regions', the Commission is now submitting a fresh communication on this subject;
2. Calls for the ORs unit in DG REGIO at the Commission to be maintained and its staff considerably strengthened in order to provide it with the resources necessary to fulfil its tasks, given the wide range of sectors involved and the complexity of the policies concerned;
3. Notes that the communication offers a particularly favourable assessment of the action taken by the Commission, even though many of the measures it prides itself on only partly address the needs of the ORs (particularly in the fields of transport and accessibility, research, fisheries and regional cooperation) and no reference is made to the problems encountered and efforts made by the ORs, for example, in connection with the renewal of

State aid schemes;

4. Notes that Structural Fund intervention continues to play a major role in the development of the ORs; nevertheless, would like see indicators other than merely GDP as compared with the Community average being used to measure the degree of cohesion achieved and cohesion policy being better coordinated with other Community policies across the board, so as to enhance synergies; calls on the Commission to display greater flexibility and adapt its current and future policies more effectively to the realities of the situation of the ORs, on the basis of Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty;
5. Notes the satisfactory results obtained under the POSEI programme (agriculture and fisheries) and in the sugar cane, rum and bananas sectors; wishes to see proper consideration given to the financial impact which the ongoing international negotiations and the measures undertaken at the WTO may have on these agricultural sectors; will closely monitor the forthcoming mid-term review of POSEI and the assessment of differentiated tax regimes;
6. Maintains that the specific characteristics of the outermost regions call for a strategy based on policies and measures that are not dependent on transitional criteria or circumstantial wealth trends, are adapted to the different needs of each of those regions and contribute to offering solutions for the permanent constraints to which they are subject;
7. Calls on the Commission, recognising the specific characteristics of and differences between ORs, on the one hand, and considering their role in the EU's integrated maritime policy, on the other, to include in its plan support measures for the fishing industries in these regions; considers that the Commission must ensure positive discrimination for the ORs' fleets in terms of access to their own fish stocks, and also, specifically, safeguard the sustainability of traditional fisheries;

Fruition stage of the stronger partnership for the ORs

8. Regrets that the proposals put forward by the Commission for the fruition of the partnership mostly concern measures which already exist or are being finalised (TEN-T, TEN-E, 7th FRDP, Framework Programme on Innovation and Competitiveness, regional policy); awaits clarification of the specific operational resources to be given to the ORs to develop these opportunities;
9. Is concerned at the ever-increasing importance placed by the Commission on tools for assessing Community policies and instruments to assist the ORs, and to estimating the quantitative effects of the handicaps faced by these regions with a view to devising a methodology for offsetting the additional costs linked to their outermost status;
10. Hopes that this tendency to take into account increasingly mathematical justifications for the measures taken will not serve as a pretext for calling into question part of the Union's policy to assist the ORs nor deter institutional and economic actors in the outermost regions by imposing conditions on them which are too difficult to meet;
11. Regrets the initial reluctance shown by DG Trade to take into account the specific

characteristics of the outermost regions when negotiating Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and urges the Commission to continue to seek compromises that respect the interests of the ORs concerned, when it comes to reaching final agreements with the ACP countries;

12. Calls on the Commission to provide evidence that it genuinely intends to promote the regional integration of the ORs so as to give real substance to the Wider Neighbourhood Action Plan it promised in 2004;
13. Is concerned at some of the measures proposed by the Commission in the transport sector, particularly the assessment of specific needs and the taking into account of environmental externalities; reiterates the need for the ORs to be given differential treatment in this area, particularly as regards the inclusion of civil aviation in the Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) system, so as not to jeopardise the efforts made to overcome their accessibility deficit;
14. Considers that Community actions should be a catalyst for a spirit of enterprise that will, including on the basis of public/private partnerships, transform the ORs into centres of excellence, driven by sectors which fully exploit their advantages and know-how, such as waste management, renewable energies, energy self-sufficiency, biodiversity, student mobility, research into climate change and crisis management;
15. Points out that many actions and programmes to be pursued and initiated for the ORs can make significant contributions to established Community and international priorities, in particular as regards climate change, the protection of biodiversity, renewable energies, health in developing countries, food supplies and diversification of economic and productive activities; welcomes the implementation of the NET-BIOME programme in particular, which is a significant example of the ORs' potential in the field of scientific research; wonders, however, about the fact that, despite the quantity of projects conducted and the extent of the OR's potential, the ORs' integration in the European Research Area (ERA) is still limited;

Debate on the future of the Union's strategy for the ORs

16. Commends the Commission on its initiative in opening a debate on the future of the strategy to assist the outermost regions, in the form of a public consultation, the results of which will serve as the basis for drawing up a new proposal by 2009;
17. Stresses, nevertheless, that this debate should not be confined to the challenges mentioned (climate change, demographic change and migration management, agriculture, maritime policy) even though these topics clearly cannot be ignored, and considers that the debate should necessarily include Lisbon strategy implementation as regards the ORs;
18. Urges that the scope of Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty (in due course Articles 349 and 355 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union), which is the cornerstone of the Union's policy to assist ORs and the basis for the approach taken to these regions by the Commission's services, should be included on the agenda for the debates so as to give them the legal, institutional and political substance they merit;
19. Stresses the importance of public services for economic, social and territorial cohesion in the

outermost regions, in such areas as air and sea transport, postal services, energy and communications;

20. Believes there is an urgent need to adopt measures aimed at combating endemic unemployment, poverty and unequal income distribution in the ORs, which have some of the worst rates in the Union;
21. Calls on the Commission to assist any Member States planning to implement the 'passerelle' clause in Article 355(6) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;
22. Believes that the ORs provide the Union with an opportunity in its current reflection on climate distortion with regard to trend observation, damage prevention, disaster response and the protection of ecosystems; calls, in this connection, on the Council to adopt without delay the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund, which is specifically aimed at the special position of outermost regions; believes also that the Commission's proposals to strengthen the Union's disaster response capacity should make full use of expertise relating to the geographical location of these regions;
23. Believes that the future common immigration policy should devote special attention to the position of ORs, which are all EU external borders, are surrounded by less-favoured third countries and are subject to very strong migratory pressure which, added to a population growth rate which in many cases is still far higher than the Community average, is causing worrying levels of economic and social tension in these regions;
24. Requests that Community support for agriculture in the ORs, which is given less emphasis than other sectors, should be the object of extensive debate with reference to identifying the real challenges, the need to move towards local self-sufficiency, farm income levels, support for producers' organisations in connection with the marketing of their products, the importance of the environmental dimension and the need to take into account the effects of the opening up of trade introduced by the EPAs and the free-trade agreements currently being negotiated with several Latin American regions;
25. Believes that ORs should be placed at the heart of EU maritime policy, and stresses that the debate on this issue should focus on the role they can play as regards sustainable use of seas, oceans and coastal areas, and international maritime governance;
26. Requests the Commission, the Council and the other EU institutions concerned to efficiently and adequately ensure future Community funding of the Union's strategy to assist ORs and the compensation of handicaps linked to their outermost status;
27. Recommends that ways of overcoming the narrowness of local markets, the increasingly open competitive environment and the difficulty of finding market outlets in mainland Europe markets, as well as of improving the coordination of ERDF/EDF and ERDF/DCI funding for cooperation projects with neighbouring countries, should also be priorities for debate, together with effective participation by the ORs in European policies to promote innovation and overcome the digital divide in order to ensure full access for the inhabitants of these regions to the means of information and communication offered by the new technologies, including broadband Internet access;

28. Stresses that the partnership, which is essential to the success of the debate, should not be limited solely to European, national and local public institutions, but should provide an opportunity, as in the past, to involve in discussions the entire economic fabric of the outermost regions, represented by structured organisations which have day-to-day experience of the impact of Community policies on the ground; calls on the Commission to submit, following the Partners' Conference due to be held in Brussels on 14 and 15 May 2008, a new communication taking due account of the progress made at the conference;
29. Considers that the best strategy for ensuring the endogenous and sustainable development of the outermost regions is to make the most of their particular attributes, as outposts of the Union outside continental Europe, especially through a form of tourism that fully reflects the wealth of their history and cultural, artistic and architectural heritage, which the Union has a duty to preserve;
- - ◦
30. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee, the national, regional and local authorities of the ORs, and the President-in-Office of the Conference of Presidents of the Outermost Regions.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Introduction

The gradual and belated recognition of the outermost regions of the European Union (ORs) has been enshrined in Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty.

Community policies for the Azores, the Canaries, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Madeira, Martinique and Reunion may be adapted to promote the integration of these regions within the European area because of their many special characteristics.

Articles 299 and 311a of the Treaty of Lisbon, which will replace Article 299(2), add to this list the islands of Saint-Martin and Saint-Barthélemy, which are administratively and politically separate from Guadeloupe. These two communities will therefore become new ORs.

However, the problems of the ORs go beyond their backwardness in terms of economic, social and regional development. They also represent a political challenge. This is because these regions have sometimes chosen deliberately to be a part of the EU and their hopes must not be disappointed, and also because they give a global dimension to the European Union and represent outposts of the Union and points of contact with other major economic groupings.

The aim of the Commission's communication is to provide an initial assessment of the 'stronger partnership for the ORs' launched in 2004, to refine the measures so far taken as the project reaches fruition and to prepare a debate on the future of the strategy.

Assessment of the stronger partnership for the OR

The Commission offers a highly favourable assessment of the first phase of the 'stronger partnership', noting that countless Community measures have been adopted to assist the ORs as part of a cross-sectoral and complementary approach which has helped improve the economic and social situation of these regions.

The three main elements of the 'stronger partnership' (improved accessibility, stronger competitiveness and better regional integration) remain relevant, since they provide an appropriate response to the priorities of the outermost regions.

Your rapporteur, however, believes that the assessment gives an excessively favourable, or at least partial, view of the situation. Despite praiseworthy intentions, the results obtained are more mixed and, regrettably, the communication never mentions the difficulties encountered on the ground in certain sectors.

Fruition of the stronger partnership for the outermost regions

The Commission believes that the strategy for the outermost regions must now reach fruition, particularly as regards efforts to coordinate the ERDF and EFD, the integration of the ORs into the European Research Area and the adaptation of services of general economic interest (SGEI) to the needs of local markets.

The Commission therefore wants to consolidate each aspect of the strategy through the adoption or implementation of 30 or so additional measures.

The most sensitive of these measures is the setting of guidelines for estimating the quantifiable effects of specific handicaps.

Although all the partners recognise the need for a methodology to quantify the additional costs of outermost status, your rapporteur calls on the European Parliament to remain vigilant in this area so as not to artificially undermine a measure that is intended to benefit the ORs.

An over-systematic methodology would be disproportionate and would not take account of the special characteristics of each of the ORs, which in some cases have no points of comparison in mainland Europe.

Similarly, the ever-increasing importance attributed to the assessment of Community policies and instruments, although clearly based on the principle of sound management of European funds, should not lead to a widespread questioning of the EU's efforts to assist the ORs.

Equally, the methodology must both comply with the principle of proportionality and avoid creating superfluous statistical tools, which could prove very expensive and of limited use.

Future of the strategy for ORs

The Commission has launched a debate on the future of the strategy, placing the emphasis on four challenges: climate change, demographic change and migration management, agriculture and maritime policy.

The results of the public consultation will help in drawing up a new communication on the future of the partnership with the ORs. The European Parliament is meeting its responsibilities in this area and the present report is a reflection of its interest in this debate.

While your rapporteur welcomes the Commission's initiative, it nevertheless feels that the topics chosen fail to cover all the major concerns of the ORs, with the result that the impact of the future strategy may be reduced.

In your rapporteur's view, some of the subjects that must be discussed include the scope of Article 299(2) (in due course Articles 299 and 311a of the Treaty of Lisbon), the preservation of traditional agriculture, increased support for the development of key sectors such as sugar cane, rum and bananas, the question of State aids, the maintenance of differentiated tax regimes, the conditions for reviewing measures taken, the compensation of additional costs and making the most of assets.

Article 311(6) includes a new provision enabling certain Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) to become ORs following a decision by the European Council. Your rapporteur would like to see the Commission working alongside the Member States concerned to prepare the planned changes as far upstream as possible, so as to facilitate the transition of these communities to their new status

Conclusion

The aims of this own-initiative report are to ensure the conditions for the economic development of the ORs and thus guarantee genuine prosperity for their populations, strengthen the competitiveness of their businesses and their territories, and convince these remote regions that the future of Europe also includes them.

Emphasis needs to be placed on the idea that the rules in force should be exploited as widely as possible by using the tools most adequate for resolving the specific problems faced by the ORs and, if necessary, making use of exemptions geared to the actual regional situation in question, without this posing a threat to the general Community interest.

After the initial phases of structural catch-up, the new generation of European programmes must pave the way for the necessary diversification of OR economies and not settle for maintaining the progress achieved largely thanks to the European Union.

Making the most of the specific assets of the ORs is the only strategy that will ensure the endogenous and sustainable development of the outermost regions. It is now no longer enough to maintain, conserve and protect; the need is to attract, extend influence and cooperate.

14.4.2008

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

for the Committee on Regional Development

on a strategy for the outermost regions: achievements and future prospects
(2008/2010(INI))

Draftsman: Pedro Guerreiro

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Fisheries calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas, despite the improvements observed, there is still a need for fresh investment in order to improve working conditions for those operating in the fisheries sector, as well as infrastructures and port equipment for fisheries, and to renew and modernise the fleets of the outermost regions (ORs),
- B. whereas the fleets consist for the most part of ageing vessels, more than 30 years old in some of the ORs, while the elimination of Community aid for fleet renewal will make it difficult to remedy a situation in which they are lagging behind the fleets from the European mainland,
- C. having regard to the ORs' dependent situation, in social and economic terms, with regard to the fish stocks in their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and to the biological vulnerability of their fishing zones,
 - 1. Stresses how important the fishing industry is in the socio-economic situation, in employment and in promoting economic and social cohesion in the ORs, whose economies suffer from permanent structural constraints and limited possibilities for economic diversification;
 - 2. Considers that the Commission must ensure positive discrimination for the ORs' fleets in terms of access to their own fish stocks, and also, specifically, safeguard the sustainability of traditional fisheries;
 - 3. Considers it necessary to maintain and step up Community support for the fishing industries in the ORs, with particular reference to the programme for compensating the

additional costs arising from their remote status vis-à-vis the disposal of certain fisheries products in a number of outermost regions (POSEI - Fisheries); in this connection, believes that this programme should continue in force indefinitely, since outermost status is a permanent factor, and appreciates the increase in appropriations for the programme in the Community budget for 2008;

4. Considers it necessary to adopt new, more effective measures, not based on transitional criteria or circumstantial wealth trends, to promote the ORs' capacity to cope with the conditions and permanent structural handicaps facing them, particularly in the fishing industry;
5. Calls on the Commission, recognising the specific characteristics of and differences between ORs, on the one hand, and considering their role in the EU's integrated maritime policy, on the other, to include in its plan support measures for the fishing industries in these regions that are aimed, in particular, at:
 - considering the area corresponding to the EEZs of ORs as an 'exclusive access zone' in order to guarantee the sustainability of marine ecosystems, fishing activity and the local communities concerned;
 - undertaking a scientific assessment of the potential of the marine resources in those waters, and, in line with the precautionary principle as defined under the CFP, reserving the EEZs adjoining the outermost regions for the local fleets;
 - evaluating, on the basis of the principle of relative stability, the socio-economic impact of an increased fishing effort and the use of certain tackle by vessels with greater fishing capacity in the EEZs adjoining the outermost regions in terms of the sustainability of the local communities concerned;
 - ensuring Community support for the renewal and modernisation of the ORs' fishing fleets, and especially the traditional fleet, since this is a sine qua non for improving the conditions of conservation of fish and safety standards for fisheries workers in those regions;
 - reinforcing Community support for scientific fisheries research and the gathering of information, in such a way as to promote the protection and recovery of fish stocks and the biodiversity of the outermost regions, while paying special attention to the specific characteristics of those regions in the context of the programmes under the Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration activities;
 - improving fishing gear and banning the use of fishing gear that destroys marine ecosystems;
 - introducing socio-economic measures to compensate fishermen for the impact of measures, voluntary or otherwise, to conserve fishery resources;
 - creating a Community programme to support small-scale inshore and artisanal fishing, taking account of its specific characteristics and its social and economic importance in

the regions concerned;

- supporting improvements to professional training and qualification, working conditions (including conditions ensuring hygiene, safety and comfort) and the economic situation for fishermen, with a view to renewing the industry's age profile;
 - boosting support for the processing, marketing and promotion of fish products from the ORs;
 - modernising and creating port infrastructure and facilities to support fishing, recalling that these are now insufficient to meet the needs of the fisheries sector in certain outermost regions;
 - boosting support for the sustainable development of aquaculture and aquaculture production, in the context of the specific needs of each of the ORs concerned;
 - support for the installation and modernisation of specific means of prevention, rescue, monitoring, checks and controls (taking account of their extensive EEZs), combating illegal fisheries, reinforcing maritime safety and preserving the marine environment;
6. Welcomes the creation of an island subdivision under the umbrella of the South Western Waters Regional Advisory Council, in the interests of a more objective treatment for the particular fisheries of the outermost regions.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

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| Date adopted | 3.4.2008 |
| Result of final vote | +: 22 -: 1 0: 3 |
| Members present for the final vote | Elspeth Attwooll, Marie-Hélène Aubert, Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos, Paulo Casaca, Zdzisław Kazimierz Chmielewski, Emanuel Jardim Fernandes, Carmen Fraga Estévez, Duarte Freitas, Ioannis Gklavakis, Alfred Gomolka, Pedro Guerreiro, Heinz Kindermann, Rosa Miguélez Ramos, Philippe Morillon, Seán Ó Neachtain, Willi Piecyk, Catherine Stihler, Margie Sudre, Daniel Varela Suanzes-Carpegna, Cornelis Visser |
| Substitute(s) present for the final vote | Ole Christensen, Josu Ortuondo Larrea, Raül Romeva i Rueda, Thomas Wise |
| Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote | Ilda Figueiredo, Willem Schuth |

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

| | |
|---|---|
| Date adopted | 8.4.2008 |
| Result of final vote | +: 49 -: 2 0: 2 |
| Members present for the final vote | Emmanouil Angelakas, Stavros Arnautakis, Elspeth Attwooll, Rolf Berend, Jana Bobošíková, Victor Boștinaru, Antonio De Blasio, Petru Filip, Gerardo Galeote, Iratxe García Pérez, Eugenijus Gentvilas, Pedro Guerreiro, Gábor Harangozó, Filiz Hakaeva Hyusmenova, Mieczysław Edmund Janowski, Rumiana Jeleva, Gisela Kallenbach, Tunne Kelam, Evgeni Kirilov, Miloš Koterec, Constanze Angela Krehl, Sérgio Marques, Miguel Angel Martínez Martínez, Miroslav Mikolášik, James Nicholson, Jan Olbrycht, Maria Petre, Markus Pieper, Pierre Pribetich, Elisabeth Schroedter, Grażyna Staniszevska, Catherine Stihler, Margie Sudre, Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, Lambert van Nistelrooij, Vladimír Železný |
| Substitute(s) present for the final vote | Bernadette Bourzai, Jan Březina, Brigitte Douay, Den Dover, Emanuel Jardim Fernandes, Francesco Ferrari, Madeleine Jouye de Grandmaison, Ramona Nicole Mănescu, Ljudmila Novak, Mirosław Mariusz Piotrowski, Zita Pleštinská, Samuli Pohjamo, Christa Prets, Manfred Weber |
| Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote | Jean-Paul Gauzès, Manuel Medina Ortega, Jacques Toubon |