



**2015/2324(INI)**

19.4.2016

# **OPINION**

of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

for the Committee on Regional Development

on an EU strategy for the Alpine region  
(2015/2324(INI))

Rapporteur: Renata Briano



## SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas under Articles 11, 191 and 193 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the Union is empowered to take action in all areas of environmental policy, such as air and water pollution, waste management and climate change;
- B. whereas Article 1(1) of Directive 2002/49/EC<sup>1</sup> makes it clear that a common approach should be developed in the European Union ‘to avoid, prevent or reduce on a prioritised basis the harmful effects, including annoyance, due to exposure to environmental noise’;
- C. whereas the Alpine Convention was signed by the Alpine countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Slovenia and Switzerland) and the EU for the sustainable development and protection of the Alps;
- D. whereas environmental policy is of a cross-cutting nature and whereas the favoured options for Alpine strategy fields must reconcile environmental sustainability and economic development; whereas climate change mitigation and biodiversity preservation policies include the need for securing the resilience of ecosystems with enough habitat connectivity to allow species migration;
- E. whereas the Alpine region is the second largest basin of biodiversity in Europe and forms one of Europe’s foremost water catchment areas, where water is not only important for hydroelectricity but also for irrigation of agricultural land, the sustainable management of forests, the preservation of biodiversity and the landscape, and the provision of drinking water;
- F. whereas agriculture and tourism in the Alpine region have a major impact on the conservation of the environment, traditional landscapes and biodiversity;
- G. whereas the area’s historical and cultural heritage is one of its prime assets;
- H. whereas Parliament adopted a resolution on 23 May 2013 on a macro-regional strategy for the Alps<sup>2</sup>;
  - 1. Stresses that the Alps are a natural environment in which close to 14 million people with a shared culture live and work, as well as being a major tourist destination which attracts some 120 million visitors each year;
  - 2. Notes the success of some agricultural models in the Alpine region which combine food production, forestry, the protection of landscape for tourism and the provision of

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<sup>1</sup> Directive 2002/49/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 June 2002 relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise – Declaration by the Commission in the Conciliation Committee on the Directive relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise, OJ L 189, 18.7.2002, p.12.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 55, 12.2.2016, p. 117.

ecosystem services such as avalanche protection; believes that these models, which serve multiple purposes and have low environmental impacts, should be expanded where appropriate;

3. Acknowledges that the Alpine region, with its vast reserve of natural landscapes, is a socio-economic area with tourism potential; notes its extraordinary variety of ecosystems, which range from upland to lowland and even to Mediterranean coasts, and which include highly sensitive aquatic ecosystems such as lakes, rivers and streams; points out that the region is extremely rich in biodiversity, as well as natural resources such as water and timber, and should be preserved;
4. Welcomes the fact that the regions are deeply involved in the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region;
5. Believes that particular attention should be paid to preserving the settlement of sparsely populated areas of the region;
6. Notes that in the Alpine region, largely man-made urbanised environments coexist alongside areas of sparsely populated mountainous countryside; takes the view that the strategy should comprise cohesive measures that apply throughout the area but take due account of the structural disparities to be found within it, and focus primarily on Alpine mountain regions because they have immense potential for sustainable economic growth; points out that rural depopulation is a factor behind hydrogeological instability in certain areas, which might have an impact on the whole region (flooding, landslides); emphasises the key role played by welfare services in sustainable growth and in countering the depopulation of mountain areas, and points to the need to better promote the EU Civil Protection Mechanism;
7. Points out that farming in mountain areas is very important for maintaining the geological stability of the Alps; notes, however, that mountain agriculture is exposed to climate-related natural disasters such as floods, avalanches and mudslides; calls, therefore, for the promotion of risk-prevention measures (for example, flood protection schemes);
8. Is concerned that climate change poses serious risks for hydrogeological instability and biodiversity; underlines that rising temperatures are a serious threat to the survival of species populations living at high altitudes, and that the melting of glaciers is a further cause for concern as it has a major impact on groundwater reserves; points, therefore, to the need for a macro-regional climate change adaptation policy and the protection and sustainable management of Alpine rivers, lakes and streams;
9. Considers it essential to pursue climate change policies based on production and consumption patterns that are in line with circular economy principles and short cycles in food supplies, and to place the emphasis on rational use and reuse of local materials and natural resources, including wastewater and agricultural waste, and on sharing services encouraged by green public procurement and fostering close links between producers and consumers at local level; recalls that the management of risks linked to climate change should take into account the structural and organisational vulnerabilities of Alpine societies; stresses the need to step up the exchange of best practices and cross-border cooperation in the area of climate risk management, taking into account all the territorial sensitivities;

10. Considers it necessary for the regions involved in the strategy to use Union funds in line with cohesion policy and to promote environment-related investments which have among their objectives climate change mitigation and adaptation and counteracting hydrogeological instability, as well as sustainable forestry, tourism, agriculture (including organic farming) and livestock, which all play an important role in land management;
11. Stresses that not enough is being done to attain the objectives of the Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC; calls on the Commission, in implementing the Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC, to observe Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora in order to ensure more sustainable water management; stresses that, in so doing, cooperation should be given preference over regulation;
12. Considers that the challenge of remaining ‘white spots’ in mobile coverage in the region can be transformed into an opportunity for both ecotourism and medical research;
13. Recalls that the integrated management of water resources is one of the keys to the sustainable development of the Alps; recalls that the natural risks, including water risks, could have a spillover effect on lowlands and built-up areas; stresses, therefore, the need to step up the exchange of best practices and cross-border cooperation in connection with the Alpine Convention’s Water Management Platform between the national bodies responsible for the management of water and river basins in order to meet the shared challenges caused by climate change;
14. Considers that investments should be channelled towards equal and effective access to healthcare for the whole population of the region;
15. Considers it necessary, given the economic importance of tourism for the entire Alpine region, to continue to support the development of ‘soft’ tourism; points, on the basis of best practices, such as the tourism platform ‘Alpine Pearls’, created as part of the EU-funded project Alps Mobility, to achievements so far which should be built on;
16. Considers it necessary to provide for energy efficiency and saving policies as well as policies to promote renewable and sustainable alternative energy sources through the proper management of water, forestry and landscape resources; deems it important to expand the model of decentralised and local energy production and supply through, inter alia, grid integration and storage; calls, therefore, for more research initiatives in this area that are geared towards the specific needs of mountain regions; stresses the importance of encouraging consumers, enterprises and public authorities to invest in renewable energy as a way of increasing energy security and preventing energy poverty; emphasises the importance of hydropower for energy supplies in mountain regions and calls for the local administrations to promote the use of hydropower, as well as other renewable sources, for the needs of the population;
17. Considers it regrettable that agricultural land is becoming increasingly scarce owing to non-agricultural uses such as road construction and designation of building land; calls for the establishment of practical support schemes and requirements to ensure the long-term availability of land for agriculture and forestry use; underlines that the issue of land consumption is very critical in the more urbanised areas; urges, therefore, that land use and urbanisation which use up valuable natural resources be carried out sustainably;

18. Calls for a holistic approach to the future design and implementation of Alpine transport and environment policy so that the achievement of a common target is not jeopardised by arbitrage and transfer effects;
19. Regrets the inadequate accessibility of economic areas, which undermines efficient mountain farming in the Alps and hence the competitiveness of these regions; urges the Commission and the Member States to create an appropriate infrastructure system, which should include the development of suitable farm and forest tracks and Alpine trails and access to a high-speed mobile data network for the Alpine regions;
20. Draws attention to the importance of sustainable tourism that is driven by protection of biodiversity and respect for ecosystems, as shown by the good example given by parks;
21. Stresses the importance of protected areas in triggering environmental protection initiatives as outlined in the Alpine Convention; considers it necessary to draw up a policy identifying parks as places in which to promote environmental protection activities; believes that protected areas are particularly sensitive areas for people and nature; is convinced that they may take on a cross-border dimension as regards the development and implementation of best practices that combine habitat protection with the sustainable economy (organic and quality farming, promotion of local products, soft tourism and mobility, wildlife management, etc.) and can be exported to all parts of the Alpine region and beyond;
22. Notes that, as regards transport, ways need to be found to allow appropriate access to the most marginal areas, which are often increasingly abandoned, within a framework of sustainable mobility;
23. Considers it necessary to develop infrastructure for new sustainable transport modes, to implement policies for the sharing of goods and services and to promote connectivity in the less developed areas, also to promote the development of teleworking;
24. Notes that the management and the reintroduction of birds of prey and carnivores in the Alpine region is carried out at national and local level, while these species do not recognise administrative borders, and that migration is a cross-border phenomenon by nature in the Alpine region; feels that it is essential, as part of the Alpine strategy and in connection with the Large Carnivores, Wild Ungulates and Society Platform of the Alpine Convention, to step up the exchange of best practices in this field;
25. Believes that local communities, regional authorities and civil society, including economic actors such as local agriculture and forestry stakeholders, should be involved in decision-making, in an open, transparent and informed process;
26. Underlines the importance of aligning the Alpine strategy with cooperation initiatives such as the Alpine Convention and the subsequent protocols thereto, as well as taking into account existing transnational cooperation and networking in this field, in order to reach common policies and goals;
27. Points out that active agriculture and forestry are essential to preserving biodiversity in the Alpine region while at the same time making a significant contribution to other sectors such as tourism;

28. Calls for targeted approaches to financing by the Member States and the European Union in relation to macro-regional policies as part of the Alpine strategy;
29. Considers it necessary to strengthen the role of local and regional authorities in the implementation of EU policies and to place the principle of multilevel governance at the centre of the planning and implementation of the Alpine strategy;
30. Calls on the Commission to introduce noise emission limits in Alpine goods transport and stronger incentive schemes to encourage investment in noise reduction measures on the main transport routes;
31. Calls for the introduction of the real cost principle and the principle of internalising external costs in relation to existing and future regulatory measures on taxes, levies and infrastructure use charges, taking account of the comprehensive strategy for the Alpine region and the need to avoid subsequent transfer and arbitrage effects;
32. Calls for a macro-regional Alpine strategy that will allow sustainable use of land and nature and hence an economic area and biosphere based on coexistence between nature and people, so as to avoid a further population exodus that would have a negative impact on nature and landscape protection.

## RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

<b>Date adopted</b>	19.4.2016
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+ :                 64 - :                 1 0 :                 0
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Marco Affronte, Pilar Ayuso, Zoltán Balczó, Ivo Belet, Simona Bonafè, Biljana Borzan, Cristian-Silviu Buşoi, Nessa Childers, Alberto Cirio, Birgit Collin-Langen, Mireille D'Ornano, Miriam Dalli, Angélique Delahaye, Jørn Dohrmann, Karl-Heinz Florenz, Francesc Gambús, Elisabetta Gardini, Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy, Jens Gieseke, Julie Girling, Sylvie Goddyn, Matthias Groote, Françoise Grossetête, Andrzej Grzyb, Anneli Jäätteenmäki, Jean-François Jalkh, Benedek Jávor, Karin Kadenbach, Kateřina Konečná, Giovanni La Via, Peter Liese, Norbert Lins, Susanne Melior, Miroslav Mikolášik, Massimo Paolucci, Piernicola Pedicini, Bolesław G. Piecha, Pavel Poc, Frédérique Ries, Daciana Octavia Sârbu, Annie Schreijer-Pierik, Tibor Szanyi, Estefanía Torres Martínez, Dame Glenis Willmott, Damiano Zoffoli
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Paul Brannen, Mark Demesmaeker, Jacqueline Foster, Elena Gentile, Martin Häusling, Krzysztof Hetman, Merja Kyllönen, Mairead McGuinness, Gesine Meissner, Ulrike Müller, James Nicholson, Christel Schaldemose, Jasenko Selimovic, Bart Staes, Keith Taylor, Tom Vandenkendelaere, Carlos Zorrinho
<b>Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote</b>	Angel Dzhambazki, Bronis Ropè, Marco Valli