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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

further to Question for Oral Answer B7-0240/2009

pursuant to Rule 115(5) of the Rules of Procedure

on a European Strategy for the Danube Region

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on behalf of the S&D Group

European Parliament resolution on a European Strategy for the Danube Region

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the question of 3 December 2009 to the Commission on a European Strategy for the Danube Region (O-0150/09 – B7-0240/2009),
 - having regard to Article 192 and Article 265(5) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
 - having regard to the conclusions of the European Council of 18 and 19 June 2009, which called on the Commission to draw up a European strategy for the Danube region before the end of 2010,
 - having regard to the programme of the Council, prepared by the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies,
 - having regard to the Danube Forum set up within Parliament and the Forum's work,
 - having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions, entitled ‘An EU strategy for the Danube area’, of October 2009,
 - having regard to the Espoo, Aarhus and Berne Conventions on environmental protection,
 - having regard to the Belgrade Convention regulating navigation on the Danube,
 - having regard to Rules 115(5) and 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the River Danube links 10 European countries - Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova and Ukraine - six of which are EU Member States,
- B. whereas the states along the Danube, with over 200 million inhabitants, represent an important fund of socio-economic potential within Europe,
- C. whereas the Danube region is an important crossover point between the EU's Cohesion Policy programmes, measures for applicant and potential applicant countries and programmes for countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy,
- D. whereas an EU Strategy for the Danube Region is to be developed in the following cooperation areas: social development and protection, sustainable economic development, transport and energy infrastructure, environmental protection, culture and education,
- E. whereas that strategy could contribute significantly to improving coordination between regional and local authorities and organisations operating in the Danube region and would make for prosperity, sustainable development, job creation and security in the area,

- F. whereas that strategy, following the model of the Baltic Sea Strategy, has the potential to promote regional and cross-border cooperation for further economic growth and to identify joint responses to common challenges,
- G. whereas the Danube region is a significant historical gateway unifying the west and the east of the EU,
- H. whereas there is a long history of cooperation in the Danube region: the European Commission for the Danube, founded on 30 March 1856 and originally based in Galați (Romania), was one of the very first European institutions, and is today based in Budapest,
- I. whereas following the 2007 enlargement the Danube has almost become an internal European Union waterway , and whereas the Danube region may make a substantial contribution to fostering the developments which have taken place since then,
- J. whereas the Danube, together with the Main Canal and the River Rhine, connects the North Sea with the Black Sea and provides the basis to exploit the geostrategic position of the Black Sea region,
- K. whereas considering the Danube region as a single macro-region would help to overcome the regional differences in economic performance and sustain integrated development,
- L. whereas the Danube Delta has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1991 and the Danube region includes several Special Protection Areas and Special Areas for Conservation under the Natura 2000 framework; whereas the Danube and the Danube Delta have a unique and fragile ecosystem that is home to rare plant species which are under threat owing to pollution,
1. Calls on the Commission to start, as soon as possible, broad consultations with all countries along the Danube and to present the EU Strategy for the Danube Region by the end of 2010 at the latest;
 2. Urges the Commission to come up with a proposal for an EU Strategy for the Danube Region in order to cover various aspects of regional cooperation on a horizontal basis, promote synergies and avoid duplication between the work of regional bodies and organisations;
 3. Believes that regional and local bodies, owing to their closeness to the local population and their awareness of its needs, should play an important role in designing, implementing and further developing the EU strategy;
 4. Supports the economic and social development of the Danube region as an EU priority area and the promotion of deeper regional integration in the Danube region as a dynamic component of a wider European economic and political area;
 5. Considers it important to make the most of the opportunities offered by the economies of the Danube region with the aim of making it one of the most attractive areas in the EU and the world;

6. Calls for improvements to the ecological status of the Danube, which is currently a polluted river, and for measures to reduce pollution and prevent further releases of oil and other toxic and harmful substances;
7. Notes that responsibility for the pollution of the Danube region lies with both the Member States and the other riparian countries through which the Danube flows; stresses that protecting the environment in the Danube river basin will have a major bearing on the agricultural and rural development of the region;
8. Underlines the need to protect and strengthen the fish stocks in the Danube; calls on the Commission to prepare a comprehensive plan for conserving and restoring natural sturgeon stocks in the River Danube;
9. Underlines the need for a coordinated approach aimed at more efficient and higher take-up of all available EU funds in the States along the Danube, with a view to meeting the objectives of the strategy;
10. Underlines that the Strategy for the Danube Region should include measures to be implemented by the European Union, its Member States and all riparian countries;
11. Stresses the need to ensure the diversification of energy sources and calls on the Commission and all riparian states to step up cooperation in the energy field;
12. Calls on the Commission, the Member States and the all riparian countries to promote and implement joint projects on energy efficiency and renewable energy resources, in the light of the region's potential as a source of bioenergy, and to encourage the use of biomass, solar, wind and hydro energy;
13. Underlines that proper environmental impact assessments should be a prerequisite for all energy-related infrastructure projects, in order to guarantee that international standards of environmental protection are met, after consulting those partners which might be affected by those decisions;
14. Recalls the role of the Danube as a unifying factor in the region; suggests that measures should be taken to facilitate border-crossing in the region;
15. Proposes the integration of the EU's transport system with those of the EU's neighbouring countries in the Danube region and stresses the importance of making provision for intermodal projects;
16. Regards the inland waterway navigation system as an important aspect of the transport development of the region, whilst recognising the decrease in inland waterway navigation, which is mainly due to the strong economic downturn, and emphasises the importance of eliminating the bottlenecks on the Rhine/Meuse-Main-Danube waterway axis in order to improve navigation;
17. Proposes that the Trans-European Network be strengthened in order to improve intermodality in the whole region and increase connectivity with the Black Sea through road and railway routes (freight corridors and high-speed rail lines);

18. Regards tourism as an important instrument for promoting the economic growth of the region;
19. Draws attention to the exceptional economic interdependence of the states in the Danube region and stresses the importance of investing in ICTs and in the development of small and medium-sized firms in order to ensure sustainable and efficient growth and stimulate the green economy in the whole Danube macro-region;
20. Supports programmes aimed at improving the multicultural environment in the Danube region by fostering multinational mobility, promoting cultural dialogue, developing forms of art and communication and protecting cultural and historical heritage;
21. Supports university exchange programmes in the region and suggests that universities in the region could form networks in order to foster centres of excellence capable of competing at international level;
22. Invites the Commission and the Member States to improve administrative arrangements in order to lessen the administrative burden inherent in developing and implementing the EU Strategy for the Danube Region;
23. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to identify priority projects for the Danube region;
24. Calls on the Commission to work closely with it in defining the priorities for the development of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and regularly to inform and consult it on the progress made with the implementation of this strategy;
25. Proposes that an EU Danube Summit be held every two years and its conclusions submitted to the European Council and Parliament;
26. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the other relevant institutions.