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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Commission

pursuant to Rule 110(2) of the Rules of Procedure

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

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

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Title XII of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and in particular to its Article 174,
- having regard to regulations governing the Structural Funds for the period 2007-2013,
- having regard to the Council Decision of 6 October 2006 on Community Strategic guidelines on cohesion¹,
- having regard to the conclusions of the European Council held in Brussels on 14-15 December 2006,
- 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 prospects,
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 13 March 2002 on the problems of island regions in the European Union in the context of enlargement²,
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 7 July 2005 on the revision of the guidelines for regional State aids,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A6-0000/2006),
- having regard to its resolution of 15 March 2007 on the islands and natural and economic constraints in the context of the regional policy,
- having regard to the Communication of the Commission of 6 October 2008 on the Green Book on Territorial Cohesion - Turning territorial diversity into strength,
- having regard to the Commission Staff Working Document of November 2008 on Regions 2020: An Assessment of Future Challenges for EU Regions,
- having regard to the *Barca Report* - An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion of April 2009,
- having regard the Communication of the Commission of 15 June 2009 on the Sixth Progress Report on Economic and Social Cohesion,

¹ OJ L 291, 21.10.2006, p. 11.

² COTER-002.

- having regard the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions of 14 April 2010 on the Strategic Reports of 2010 by the Commission on the Implementation of the Cohesion Policy Programmes,
 - having regard to Rule 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas it is concerned about island regions suffering from an accumulation of disadvantages and has stressed the need to help them to overcome these difficulties and exploit their potentials to contribute to the territorial cohesion of the EU,
 - B. whereas the principle of territorial cohesion was consolidated in the regulations on the Structural Funds 2007-2013 and is one of the new European Union's key objectives introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, aiming to secure its harmonious development by reducing regional disparities and removing obstacles to development, including obstacles linked to natural and geographical handicaps,
 - C. whereas being a remote and small territory is a factor that distinguishes islands from other European regions and the insularity has to be considered as a permanent natural feature which affects islands' performance in terms of sustainable development, creating unequal opportunities between these territories and the rest of the territories of the Union,
 - D. whereas several European islands suffer from not one but several of the handicaps mentioned in Article 174 including mountainous islands, those with a very low population density or those which are affected by double or multiple insularity which reduces the access of the population to important services,
 - E. whereas following the same 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 including islands regions,
 - F. whereas as well as being islands, they are also peripheral regions situated on the EU's external borders and exposed to the risks inherent in such a situation: proximity to conflict zones, exposure to clandestine immigration or various kinds of trafficking, vulnerability to accidental or deliberate marine pollution, etc.,
 - G. whereas European islands are particularly exposed to the challenges facing Europe such as globalisation, demographic change, climate change, and the energy supply,
 - H. whereas European islands contribute to the diversity of the Union both in environmental terms (specific habitats and endemic species) and in cultural terms (languages, architectural heritage, sites, landscapes, gastronomy, traditions),
 - I. whereas European islands can contribute to a strengthened sustainable development of the Union due to their high potential producing energy from renewable sources thanks to their privileged position: exposure to the wind streams, ocean swell and sun,
1. Welcomes the EUROISLANDS study which is developed under the framework of ESPON 2007-2013 programme because a better understanding of islands' reality is needed at

European scale; it stresses that a deeper knowledge of the situation on the islands is essential if their special characteristics are to be taken satisfactorily into account;

2. Welcomes the inclusion of territorial cohesion as a new objective of the Union and the new Article 174 which states that special attention should be paid to regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps including islands regions; it believes that these provisions should be translated into specific development strategies and concrete measures aiming to overcome the handicaps and exploit the potentials linked to insularity;
3. Welcomes the Commission study 'Territories with specific geographical features', although it does not share the idea that European islands are far from constituting a homogeneous group of regions which deserve a specific regional development programmes; highlights that European islands share some important common features which differentiate them from the mainland;
4. Believes that insularity represents an opportunity and a handicap which needs a specific development strategy for the exploitation of its potential of development increasing the competitiveness of island regions;
5. Calls on the Commission to work towards more pertinent and territorialised statistical indicators in order to provide a more faithful picture of the development level of island regions; such indicators should offer a better understanding of islands' needs, avoiding the risk of encompassing islands into larger mainland units and must take into account accumulated difficulties such as mountains ranges, groupings of islands, cases of double insularity; stresses that these indicators should permit an improved assessment of the existing difference among island and mainland regions;
6. Calls for the inclusion of a specific European integrated and flexible policy framework, with legal and financial implications, for dealing with the European islands based on their shared features but taking into account the diversity situations and following the principle of proportionality; Cohesion Policy should address the situation of the islands not just through Regional Policy, but also using other EU policies that have a significant territorial impact on the development of these regions; believes that an European policy framework for islands may have the needed added value to overcome islands' permanent handicaps and adapt their development model utilising their assets;
7. Welcomes the setting-up by the Commission of an Inter-services Group to address Territorial Cohesion issues, amongst which the situation of territories with permanent and severe handicaps including islands;
8. Calls on the Commission for establishing mandatory ex-ante impact assessments before setting up policies, measures and instruments which may have an important territorial impact on islands; remarks that the Commission should ensure that European measures benefit all regions and have non undesired side effects when implemented on islands;
9. Calls on Member States and regional and local authorities to play an important role in islands' development strategies because a vertical approach with the implication and

contribution of all levels of government, observing the principle of subsidiarity, is required to put European islands in the right path of sustainable development;

10. Calls on the Commission, regarding the next programming period of the Regional Policy, to give island regions, independently of their classification under the eligibility criteria, the possibility to carry out infrastructure works with European financing due to the fact that European islands lack of infrastructures in important sectors such as transport and energy;
11. Calls for dropping distance-related criteria (150 km) when it comes to classifying islands as border regions eligible for financing under the cross-border cooperation programmes in the framework of the Territorial Cooperation Objective of the Cohesion Policy or in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy; believes that in case it would be necessary to establish some kind of limit, it would be more appropriate for island regions that the cross-border territory condition was applied at maritime basin level;
12. Welcomes the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) as an instrument aimed to overcome the obstacles hindering territorial cooperation; encourages island regions to make use of EGTC for the management of territorial cooperation projects with other regions co-financed by the EU as a way to bring them closer to their surrounding economic areas;
13. Welcomes the DG TREN Call for Proposals for a preparatory action in view to defining specific strategies, tailored to European Islands potential, to implement the EU energy policy, as far as sustainable energy is concerned of 9 April 2009 and the consequent Pact of Islands signed by different island authorities in order to go beyond the objective set up by the EU for 2020, reducing the CO2 emissions in their respective territories by at least 20%;
14. Welcomes the inclusion of tourism as a new competence for the EU and the Communication from the Commission Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe- of 30 June 2010; calls on the Commission to take into account European islands' situation and needs in this area because many of them rely on tourism as their main source for development and growth; welcomes the existing initiatives of EDEN, CALYPSO and Sustainable Tourism and encourages European islands to take advantage on them;
15. Calls on the Commission to place particular emphasis on the development of broadband and to promote measures for solving the specific difficulties of providing services in island regions due to their territorial discontinuity, such as health care and online medical services, electronic governance and citizens' services such as distance learning;
16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the social partners and the industry.