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B7-0523/2010

## **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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on behalf of the PPE Group

**B7-0523/2010**

**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 the 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 cohesion<sup>1</sup>,
- 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 7 July 2005 on the revision of the guidelines for regional State aids,
- 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 the Communication of the Commission of 6 October 2008 on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion - Turning territorial diversity into strength,
- having regard to the Commission Staff Working Document 'Regions 2020 - an assessment of future challenges for EU regions' (SEC(2008)2868),
- having regard to the Commission Working Papers on 'Territories with specific geographical features' (number 02/2009),
- 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 policy,
- having regard to the Communication of the Commission of 15 June 2009 on the Sixth Progress Report on Economic and Social Cohesion,
- having regard to the Communication of the Commission of 31 March 2010 on Cohesion policy: Strategic Report 2010 on the implementation of the programmes 2007-2013 (SEC(2010)360),
- having regard to Rule 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 291, 21.10.2006, p 11.

- A. 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,
- B. whereas it is important to clarify the impact of the Lisbon Treaty provisions on the status of regions deserving particular measures in the framework of regional policy,
- C. whereas following the 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 due 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 and the new article 174; believes that the provisions of the article 174 should be translated into specific development strategies and concrete measures aiming to overcome the handicaps and exploit the potentials of these regions;
  - 2. Welcomes the Commission Working Papers on 'Territories with specific geographical features'; considers however that mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas are constituting homogeneous groups of regions and that they deserve specific regional development programmes; highlights that these groups of regions share some important common features which differentiate them from other regions; stresses, in this context, also the special situation of the small island Member States, situated at the outskirts of the Union;
  - 3. Is of the opinion that GDP must remain the main criterion for determining the 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 the GDP (total population, unemployment-employment rates, level of education, population density) can already be used by the Member States in redistribution of funds among regions, within their allocated envelopes, taking into account the specific attributes of each region;
  - 4. Calls for the inclusion of a specific European integrated and flexible policy framework, with legal and financial implications, for dealing with the mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas based on their shared features but taking into account the diverse situations and following the principle of proportionality; is of the opinion that 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 a European policy framework for mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas may have the needed added value to overcome the permanent

handicaps of these regions and adapt their development model utilising their assets;

5. Calls on Member states and regional and local authorities to play an important role in the development strategies of mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas because a vertical approach with the implication and contribution of all levels of government, observing the principle of subsidiarity, is required to put these regions in the right path of sustainable development taking into consideration other important sectors in the region; stresses that the potential within these regions, often with vast natural resources, can contribute positively in achieving the goals, especially in the field of energy policy and R&D, as set out in the EU2020 strategy;
6. 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 also within the new financial perspectives and during the next programming period;
7. Underlines that the objective of economic and social development in these handicapped regions can only be achieved throughout an effective formulation of specific EU programmes and actions adapted to each region, aimed at achieving a structural adjustment of these regions, making them more competitive and capable of facing the main existing challenges, and also throughout an efficient coordination and implementation of the four Structural Funds, Cohesion Fund and other financial instruments, such as those provided by the European Investment Bank;
8. Welcomes the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) as an instrument aimed to overcome the obstacles hindering territorial cooperation; encourages mountain regions, islands and sparsely populated areas 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;
9. Encourages the Member states to take to full use of the European Neighbourhood Policy instruments in the mountain areas, sparsely populated areas and islands in order to benefit in the resources available cross the borders;
10. 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;
11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council, the governments of the Member States, regional and local government as well as the economic and social partners.