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B7-0129/2011

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

further to Questions for Oral Answer B7-0011/2011 and B7-0013/2011

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

on the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

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B7-0129/2011

European Parliament resolution on the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 192 and Article 265(5) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to the oral question to the Commission on the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (O-00029/2011),
- having regard its Resolution of 21 January 2010 on a European Strategy for the Danube region (P7-TA (2010)0008),
- having regard to the Communication of the Commission of 8 December 2010 on the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (COM(2010)715) and its Action Plan (SEC(2010)1489),
- having regard to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (COM(2009) 248),
- having regard to the European Council of 18 and 19 June 2009, which called on the Commission to draw up, by 2010, a European Strategy for the Danube Region,
- 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 its resolution of 26 October 2006 on the promotion of inland waterway transport: NAIADES, an integrated European Action Programme for inland waterway transport,
- having regard to the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions of October 2009 on ‘An EU strategy for the Danube area’,
- having regard to the Council work programme for the next 18 months drawn up by the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian presidencies,
- having regard to the Hungarian Government’s statement on launching a European Roma Strategy during its Presidency,
- having regard to the Espoo, Aarhus and Berne Conventions on environmental protection,
- having regard to the Water Framework Directive and the Helsinki Convention,
- 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 Treaty of Lisbon acknowledges territorial cohesion as an objective of the European Union (Article 3 TEU),
- B. whereas macro-regional strategies are aimed at making better use of existing resources to tackle issues of territorial development and identify joint responses to common challenges,
- C. whereas the Baltic Sea Strategy already provides a model for coordinating EU policies and funding in geopolitical territorial units – macro-regions – defined on the basis of specific criteria, in particular nature and landscape related criteria,
- D. whereas the Danube region, comprising 14 European countries and 115 million people both within and outside the EU – Germany, Austria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Moldova and Ukraine – is an area where enhanced synergies between various EU policies – cohesion, transport, economic, energy, environment, culture, education, agriculture, fisheries, enlargement and neighbourhood policies – can be developed,
- E. whereas the EU Strategy for the Danube Region should therefore combine and coordinate economic, environmental, social and cultural elements,
- F. whereas that strategy should contribute significantly to improving multi-level governance and involvement of partners, organisations and NGOs operating in the Danube region and would make for prosperity, sustainable development, job creation and security in the area,
- G. whereas the Danube region is a significant historical gateway unifying the West and the East of the EU, and whereas the Danube is considered to provide a means of extending the European Union,
- H. whereas the River Danube has almost become an internal waterway of the European Union following the 2007 enlargement, and, in accordance with the natural flow of the river, the Danube Region may make a substantial contribution to reflect the changes since that enlargement,
- I. whereas the Danube region constitutes an interconnected macro-region with heterogeneous economic capacities, and whereas considering the Danube area as a single macro-region would help overcome the regional differences in economic performance, prevent inefficient competition and sustain integrated development,
- J. 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 within the Natura 2000 framework; whereas the Danube and the Danube Delta have a unique and fragile ecosystem, which is home to rare plant species that are under threat due to pollution,
- K. whereas Roma communities, 80% of whom live in the Region, suffer especially from social and economic exclusion, spatial segregation and sub-standard living conditions,

1. Considers that the enlargement of the European Union as well as major trans-national challenges such as the economic crisis, environmental threats, sustainable transport, energy connectivity, resource sustainability, the ecological use of water resources, show that the interdependence of individual states is on the rise, sectoral thinking is no longer appropriate and in this context the establishment of macro-regions opens up new, more efficient perspectives for cooperation by taking an integrated, coordinated approach to sustainable development on a broader regional territorial level and setting out a more efficient use of the Danube Region's immense potential for development and prevention of natural disasters;
2. Highlights the integrative and unifying character of the strategy, giving a new impetus to sustainable growth at local, regional, national and European level, not only within the limits of Central and Southern Europe, but also in a much wider geographical context;
3. Emphasizes that the Danube Region is Europe's gate to the Western Balkans therefore the European Strategy for the Danube Region is not only conducive to the improvement of neighbourhood relations in Central Europe but provides important added value in the EU's Eastern European policy, thus represents an excellent opportunity for the entire Union to fortify its political and economic cooperation with the Balkans, and, as a consequence, to contribute to the expansion and consolidation of the process of European integration in the region;
4. Stresses the need to involve the relevant regional and local stakeholders and civil society of the Danube region at all stages of decision-making (preparation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation) in order to find solutions to common challenges, to select and implement efficiently the concrete projects and to achieve a good governance mechanism; urges the governments to support and facilitate measures to enable NGOs, trade associations and civil society to pro-active participation, considering also women's network and minority groups;
5. Reminds that full transparency in the decision-making process, including project selection and allocation of EU funding, has to be ensured as well as the independence of members of the monitoring committees and experts;
6. Emphasizes that the Danube Strategy, together with the various forms of cross-border cooperation that it implies, could easily become a key factor for generating well-being, improving quality of life and for economic, social and environmental development, catalyzing local and regional efforts and development needs, contributing to the creation of strong cross-border interrelations including small scale projects (people-to-people programmes) in various fields such as culture, education, employment, environmental protection, industrial supply chains, municipal cooperation projects and transnational transport modernization initiatives;
7. 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;
8. Stresses that protecting the environment in the Danube basin is an important aspect which will have a major bearing on the agricultural and rural development of the region and

therefore calls on all parties concerned to implement a common agreement on safeguarding the Danube against pollution, as proposed in the so-called Helsinki Convention;

9. Takes note of the medium and long-term forecasts which indicate that the Southern regions of Europe - including the Member States located in the south-eastern part of Europe - will be particularly affected by the consequences of climate change; is convinced that the Danube Strategy has an important role to play in these regards, and should be designed with the view and objective to mitigate adverse effects related to climate change in the Danubian regions, taking into account the complex role and nature of the network of rivers (water supply, ecological aspects, transport infrastructure, irrigation and agricultural dimension, protected species and flora, etc.);
10. Points out that Central Europe is from an ecological point of view one of the richest but at the same time one of the most vulnerable areas of Europe, characterised by an ecosystem of high ecological complexity and great value therefore requiring a high level of protection. The European Strategy for the Danube Region aims at creating a liveable, sustainable and at the same time developed, prosperous Danube Region by managing environmental risks such as floods and industrial pollution, preserving the quality and quantity of water reserves under control and ensuring their sustainable use, preserving biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils;
11. Insists on an ecosystem based approach; is convinced that measures aimed at conserving the natural flood retention capacity of the Danube basin and preventing the recurrence of floods are most appropriate to meet the Danube region's unique sensitivity and vulnerability;
12. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that EU money is not spent on projects that are inconsistent with the implementation of EU environmental legislation, in particular Water Framework Directive, Birds and Habitats Directives, and Environmental Impact Assessment Directives;
13. Stresses that smart economic development and investments are very promising areas of economic growth. Green technologies and ecological modernisation, such as improved energy efficiency, renewable energies and better waste management can contribute to the sustainable development of the region and the reduction of the negative environmental impacts of economic activity;
14. Acknowledges the important role played by the Danube Strategy in the promotion and green economy, green innovation and in a larger sense research and innovation aiming at the emergence of a new, competitive low-carbon economy, and a stronger presence of environmental friendly approaches in the development of cross-border industrial cooperation projects;
15. Considers sustainable tourism an important instrument for promoting the economic growth of the region, noting for example the opportunities offered by ecotourism and the economic potential of the cycling trail along almost the entire Danube, i.e. Route 6 of the EuroVelo Network;

16. Underlines that environmentally friendly transport modes as rail or inland waterway transport, intermodal logistic concepts to promote a better combination between rail and inland waterway transport, promotion of river-adapted ships for the shallow Danube and better equipment at inland ports on the river shall gain priority while planning the integrated, sustainable transport system of the region, with full respect to all relevant elements of applicable EU acquis;
17. Urges to put more emphasis on the construction of vessels for use on different kinds of waters, including limited draught or variable water levels, without harming the natural environment to achieve improved navigability;
18. Calls on the Commission to base the removal of existing navigability bottlenecks on the river on the recommendations currently in effect;
19. Encourages the enhancement of Danube's cultural environment by promoting cultural dialogue, supporting university exchange programmes and youth projects based on transnational cooperation, fostering sustainable tourism, and protecting the historical and built heritage;
20. Encourages strengthening projects and networks of projects for vulnerable groups like women and girls who are in danger of trafficking in human persons;
21. Emphasises the need to fight the social and economic exclusion of marginalised communities, especially Roma;
22. Regrets that the strategy failed to provide for a sustainable solution for the conflict between protection of the environment and increase of transport which are both declared aims of the strategy; given the fact that a good ecological status of the Danube is a prerequisite of all human activity along the river, demands that the requirements of the environment have priority;
23. Stresses the necessity of a coordinated approach with a view to more efficient use of all available EU funds in the countries of the Danube Region so that the goals of the Strategy can be fulfilled to the best possible extents;
24. Underlines the importance of providing the necessary technical assistance for the implementation of the actions and projects carried out in the framework of the EUSDR. Costs of technical assistance shall be better recognised and considered while planning the financial framework for the Strategy. The amount provided for assistance shall be available for partners if it is used for purposes and actions coordinated on macro-regional level;
25. Calls on the Commission to regularly inform and consult the European Parliament on the status of implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region; Stresses that the Commission shall provide information on EU funded projects on annual basis;
26. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Committee of the Regions and other relevant institutions.