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A macro-regional strategy for the Alps

European Parliament resolution of 23 May 2013 on a macro-regional strategy for the Alps (2013/2549(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 192, 265(5) and 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
 - having regard to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (COM(2009)0248),
 - having regard to the Alpine Convention of 7 November 1991,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 8 December 2010 entitled ‘European Union Strategy for Danube Region’ (COM(2010)0715) and the indicative action plan accompanying that strategy (SEC(2009)0712),
 - having regard to its resolution of 17 February 2011 on the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region¹,
 - having regard to the European Council conclusions of 24 June 2011, in which the European Council invited the Member States to ‘continue work in cooperation with the Commission on possible future macro-regional strategies’,
 - having regard to the Commission proposal of 6 October 2011 for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal (COM(2011)0611),
 - having regard to Rules 115(5) and 110(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas macro-regional strategies are aimed at making better use of existing resources to tackle territorial development issues, identifying joint responses to common challenges, enhancing spatial integration and boosting the effectiveness of several forms of EU-supported policies and partnerships between public administrations and local and regional authorities, as well as other institutions and civil society organisations;
- B. whereas the Commission is proposing that the transnational strand of territorial cooperation policy should be enhanced and that any new macro-regional strategies should be initiated on a voluntary basis but draw on previous experience and best practice;
- C. whereas the territories that make up the Alpine region share many common features, such as the geographical uniqueness of their high mountain areas and their close interactions with the larger cities in the peri-Alpine belt;
- D. whereas the macro-regional strategy for the Alps, which should be comparable to the strategies adopted by the EU for the Baltic Sea and Danube regions, will afford an

¹ OJ C 188 E, 28.6.2012, p. 30.

opportunity to give the Alps a new dimension and greater significance in the EU context, in terms of better access to funding;

- E. whereas the Alpine region belongs to several EU Member States and non-EU countries, and constitutes an interconnected macro-region with heterogeneous economic capacities and growing concerns over environmental issues, demographic change, transport infrastructure, tourism and energy-related issues, and whereas coordination of the internal and external policies of all stakeholders could produce better results and added value;
- F. whereas the Alps are mountains of European and international interest, with fragile ecosystems and a large number of glaciers that are seriously affected by climate change, as well as a high number of protected natural areas and various protected endemic species of flora and fauna;
- G. whereas cohesion policy aims to achieve economic, social and territorial cohesion across the EU;
 - 1. Believes that the development of large-scale strategies, such as macro-regional strategies, should contribute to enhancing the role of the local and regional level in the implementation of EU policy, and that the multi-level governance principle should be put at the heart of the planning and implementation of the Alps strategy;
 - 2. Recalls the results of the learning experience afforded by the Baltic Sea Strategy and the Danube Strategy as regards transparency in the decision-making process and the allocation of EU funding; calls on the Commission to submit without delay a specific action plan for this area with a view to overcoming the structural handicaps faced by mountain regions and creating the right conditions for economic growth and effective social and territorial cohesion in the region;
 - 3. Highlights the positive role played by EU legislative tools such as the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) in relation to macro-regions, since they provide structural support for concrete aspects of cooperation and the exchange of good practice as well as for the design and implementation of territorial development strategies allowing authorities at different levels to cooperate;
 - 4. Welcomes the current developments in, and the strong bottom-up approach adopted by, the regions of the Alpine area, which have repeatedly expressed their desire for an Alpine strategy to address effectively challenges common to the entire Alpine arc, to exploit its considerable potential more consistently and to address the need to improve mobility, energy security, environmental protection, social and economic development, cultural exchange, and civil protection in the Alpine region;
 - 5. Regards sustainable development of the Alps as one of the main goals within the macro-regional strategy, taking into account the high number of glaciers affected by climate change;
 - 6. Believes that this strategy should also encourage, and try to facilitate cooperation on, the designation of European protected natural areas, as exemplified by the recent joint initiative of the Parc National du Mercantour (France) and the Parco Naturale delle Alpi Marittime (Italy);

7. Points out the importance of aligning the content of the strategy for the Alps with the Alpine Convention and the subsequent protocols thereto, as well as taking into account existing transnational cooperation and networking in this field;
8. Emphasises that a macro-regional strategy for the Alps should take into account the preservation of forms of traditional – primarily agricultural – land use, so as to foster biodiversity, as well as the preservation of existing protected areas;
9. Calls for a macro-regional strategy for the Alps to be the subject of a comprehensive evaluation by the Commission, based on objective criteria and measurable indicators;
10. Calls on the Commission genuinely to implement Article 174 TFEU through a strategic plan, with a view to overcoming the structural handicaps of mountain regions and creating the right conditions for economic growth and effective social and territorial cohesion in the Alpine region;
11. Believes that the strategy's territorial dimension will lead to the concrete development of the idea of territorial cohesion;
12. Stresses that a macro-regional strategy for the Alps is an effective tool for enhancing European territorial cooperation within the region concerned by applying a bottom-up approach and expanding cooperation through better use of available resources, thereby facilitating cross-sector policy coordination;
13. Emphasises that a macro-regional strategy for the Alps would ensure that the EU's different initiatives relating to the Alpine region and mountain areas complement each other, and would bring real added value to concrete projects;
14. Considers that a macro-regional strategy for the Alps must coordinate existing EU funds, in particular under the cohesion policy, in order to implement projects aimed at addressing common challenges such as protection of the environment, investment in competitiveness and innovation, agriculture and forestry, water, energy, environmental and climate issues and transport;
15. Stresses that a possible macro-regional strategy for the Alps would be in line with the Europe 2020 objectives, thereby ensuring conformity with the EU's commitment to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth;
16. Underlines the importance of increasing, by means of such a strategy, the innovative capacity of the Alps region by making use of the skills offered by its labour force, creating partnerships and cooperation among key stakeholders (labour market, education, training and research, and employers), keeping active young people in the area, supporting creativity and enhancing the capacity of the different regions in the areas of education, science and research;
17. Stresses that the new 'macro-regional' cooperation framework must ensure that the natural handicaps of peripheral regions, such as high mountain areas, are converted into assets and opportunities, and that the sustainable development of these regions is stimulated;
18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the other relevant institutions.