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- A. whereas the problem of missing persons (Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Greeks, Turks and others) is exclusively a humanitarian one deriving from the right of the relatives of missing persons to know their fate,
- B. whereas the great agony and suffering of the families of missing persons, who have remained ignorant of their fate for decades, cannot continue any longer, and must finally come to an end,
- C. whereas the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP) in Cyprus has been reactivated under the aegis of the UN Secretary-General, and progress, albeit slow, has been made with the exhumation and identification of remains,
- D. whereas the European Parliament applauds the constructive cooperation between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot members of the CMP,
1. Calls on the parties concerned to cooperate sincerely and honestly on a speedy completion of the appropriate investigations into the fate of all missing persons in Cyprus and to implement fully the ECHR judgment of 10 May 2001;
2. Calls on the parties concerned and all those who have, or are in a position to have, any information or evidence emanating from personal knowledge, archives, battlefield reports or records of detention places to pass it on to the CMP without any further delay;
3. Calls on the Council and the Commission to concern themselves actively with this problem, providing, inter alia, financial assistance to the CMP, and to take all necessary steps, in cooperation with the United Nations Secretary-General, to bring about the implementation of the aforementioned ECHR judgment and the relevant UN and European Parliament resolutions;
4. Calls for the problem to be referred to its appropriate committee with a view to follow-up, in close cooperation with the Commission, developments on this issue; asks that the committee be requested to submit periodical reports, the first within six months;
5. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the governments of Cyprus, Turkey, Greece and the United Kingdom.
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Regional policy (islands and natural and economic constraints)

European Parliament resolution of 15 March 2007 on the islands and natural and economic constraints in the context of the regional policy (2006/2106(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the regulations governing the Structural Funds for the Period 2007-2013,
- having regard to the Council Decision 2006/702/EC of 6 October 2006 on Community strategic guidelines on cohesion ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to the conclusions of the European Council held in Seville on 21-22 June 2002,
- having regard to the conclusions of the European Council held in Brussels on 14-15 December 2006,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 291, 21.10.2006, p. 11.

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- 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⁽¹⁾,
 - 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 enlargement⁽²⁾,
 - 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⁽³⁾,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A6-0044/2007),
- A. whereas the European Parliament has frequently drawn attention to the plight of islands suffering from an accumulation of disadvantages and has stressed the need to help them to overcome those difficulties and to reduce regional disparities,
- B. whereas the concepts of ultraperipherality and insularity should not be confused with one another, even if many ultraperipheral regions are also islands; whereas the specific provisions of Article 299 of the EC Treaty, which have provided a sound legal basis for measures to be taken to provide effective compensation to assist the ultraperipheral regions, are to be distinguished from the provisions of Article 158 of the EC Treaty and from the Declaration on islands regions contained in the Treaty of Amsterdam, which have never been the subject of implementing provisions, as a result of which there have been imbalances in economic development between the core of the EU, on the one hand, and the islands on its periphery on the other,
- C. whereas cohesion, as one of the EU's key objectives, aims to ensure multi-centred and harmonious development by reducing regional disparities and by removing obstacles to development, including obstacles which are linked to natural and geographical handicaps,
- D. whereas the principle of territorial cohesion has been further consolidated in the regulations on the Structural Funds 2007-2013, and whereas that principle constitutes an integral part of cohesion policy, which should be preserved and strengthened in the future and which has as its objective the multi-centred integration of the EU's territory so as to secure equal opportunities for all the regions and their populations,
- E. whereas illegal immigration by sea is one of the main problems facing the EU and whereas, within the last year, migratory pressure has been particularly intense on the EU's external maritime frontiers, and particularly on the islands in the Mediterranean, which are called upon to carry a wholly disproportionate burden, simply because of their geographical location,
- F. whereas the European Council held in Brussels on 14-15 December 2006 emphasised the need for immigration to be tackled globally, and that the efforts made so far need to be redoubled, particularly in some of the EU's island regions, since they constitute the EU's maritime frontiers and migration routes,
1. Believes that insularity is both a geocultural characteristic that is open to potential exploitation by a development strategy, and a permanent handicap which renders the situation even more difficult as regards the competitiveness of these regions;
2. Acknowledges that a number of concrete provisions in favour of structurally disadvantaged regions have been incorporated in the regulations on the Structural Funds 2007-2013; regrets, however, that the Council did not take on board other important proposals from the Parliament, such as the possibility of increasing the co-financing rate for areas affected by more than one geographical or natural handicap;

(¹) OJ C 76 E, 25.3.2004, p. 111.

(²) OJ C 192, 12.8.2002, p. 42.

(³) OJ C 31, 7.2.2006, p. 25.

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3. Calls on the Commission, with regard to the programming period 2007-2013 concerning the operational programmes of island regions, including those of objective 2, to exhaust all avenues giving them the possibility to carry-out measures related to infrastructure works that are very much needed;
4. Welcomes the emphasis given to the territorial dimension of cohesion policy in the Commission strategic guidelines on cohesion 2007-2013; notes, in particular, that supporting the economic diversification of areas with natural handicaps figures among the priorities for the next programming period; urges, therefore, the managing authorities of the Member States concerned to take full account of this priority in the preparation of their national strategic reference frameworks and operational programmes;
5. Calls on the Commission to pay special attention to and address the situation of islands and other structurally disadvantaged regions in the Fourth Cohesion Report;
6. Calls on the Commission, in the context of the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) work programme, to pay special attention to the situation of regions, and islands in particular, that are beset by natural handicaps; considers that a sound and thorough knowledge of the situation on the islands is essential if their special characteristics are to be taken satisfactorily into account; urges the Member States to establish specific mechanisms permitting the gathering of relevant data concerning the islands at local level, which will subsequently be forwarded to ESPON;
7. Calls on the Commission to update the statistical information it obtained during all the 2003 studies concerning the islands; believes that further work should be oriented towards defining more pertinent statistical indicators that are more amenable to providing a distinct statistical picture of the development level, and a satisfactory understanding of the regions with geographical and natural handicaps, and particularly where there are accumulated difficulties, such as mountain ranges, groupings of islands, and cases of double insularity; stresses that these indicators should also permit an improved assessment of the differences between these regions and the rest of the EU as well as an assessment of the disparities existing within those regions; calls on the Commission to record and report on those indicators on a regular basis, together with examples of best practice;
8. Acknowledges the fact that the Commission highlights the special situation of islands and peripheral regions in the guidelines on national regional aid for 2007-2013 and in the guidelines on state aid and risk capital for small and medium-sized undertakings; considers, however, that in order to deal more satisfactorily with the permanent disadvantage of such territories there should be increased flexibility in the implementation of existing and future state aid policies, without such flexibility causing unacceptable market distortions within the EU; asks the Commission to review its approach so as to take better account of the need of islands to enjoy access to the internal market on equal terms with mainland regions; considers, in this respect, that improved transport links should constitute a priority action in this field, especially in the case of ports and airports;
9. Calls on the Commission to study the possibility of permitting state aid to be granted to island regions where fuel and energy costs clearly adversely affect the competitiveness of the communities living on them; notes, in particular, that significant fluctuations in the cost of fuel can make transportation between island regions and mainland Europe significantly more burdensome; believes that, in its next regional state aid guidelines, a regime allowing operating aids should be extended to all island regions which are not island states or inland islands;
10. Calls on the Commission to undertake and to present to the Parliament, on a regular basis, a 'special needs assessment' study of island regions taking into account issues of specific concern to islands and proposing measures to address them; considers that such an assessment should focus in particular on the impact of the implementation of regional policy on islands, including on levels of investment, the spread of economic activity, unemployment, transport infrastructure (notably, ports and airports), environmental pressures and the overall level of economic and social integration of islands within the internal market;
11. Calls on the Member States to ensure that the special environmental, cultural and social characteristics of the island regions are effectively protected using measures, such as the drawing up of appropriate regional development plans and the controlling of building and construction activity, and, in addition, to adopt, in cooperation with the Commission, integrated programmes to safeguard cultural heritage and environmental resources;

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12. Approves of the trans-sectoral approach to the implementation of Community policies, as reflected in the Commission's green paper entitled 'Towards a future Maritime Policy for the Union: A European vision for the oceans and seas', and insists that this approach be applied primarily to islands which constitute a fundamental part of Europe's maritime dimension; calls on the Commission to extend the trans-sectoral approach to other policies so that they take into account the specific circumstances of island regions, thereby boosting their ability to integrate fully and to reap the benefits of the internal market and the Lisbon Strategy;
13. Draws special attention to islands far from large centres of population which, accordingly, experience difficulties of access and in providing services and bear higher costs, particularly in relation to transport, which place them at a competitive disadvantage;
14. Encourages the efforts made towards a holistic Community maritime policy, which will be extended beyond the legal borders of the EU, and will therefore establish, through the advantageous geopolitical location of the Community islands, strong commercial, economic and political relations and technical cooperation (exchange of knowledge and expertise) with neighbouring countries on the basis of international maritime law, mutual respect and benefit;
15. Considers that islands face higher than average per capita costs in respect of transport and environmental infrastructure as well as in relation to their energy needs and often find it harder to implement certain parts of the *acquis* which may not have taken fully into account their specificities; calls, therefore, on the Commission to adopt a more flexible approach towards islands in policy formulation and in legislation, the implementation of which may be particularly burdensome for islands;
16. Requests the Commission to set up, within the Directorate-General for Regional Policy, an administrative unit for the islands, along the lines of the existing administrative unit for the outermost regions, to ensure that the special characteristics and the needs of islands, and their permanent and seasonal populations, are systematically taken into account in policy development which aims to achieve social, economic and territorial cohesion, and in implementing measures, particularly in the fields of transport, energy, the securing of adequate water resources, the surveillance of regional border areas and the protection of the fragile island environment;
17. Wishes to see the Commission further exploit the possibility offered by the EC Treaty of adapting Community policies likely to have negative repercussions on the economic, social and territorial development of these regions, with the view to remedying, as far as possible, the major problems which specifically affect each region or group of island regions;
18. Considers that special attention should be given to those areas of economic activity which are more prevalent on islands, notably agriculture, fisheries, tourism and crafts; calls, therefore, on the Commission to ensure that its policy initiatives increasingly take into account the specific needs of islands in these areas;
19. Calls on the Commission to consider what adjustments are needed to the 'market investor' test for state aid in order to reflect the realities of life on islands and other remote regions where it can be impossible to find or evaluate a market investor as there may be none in the area; the average level of return for a given sector is also very unlikely to be met due to the small size and remote nature of the markets, thus making this test impossible to satisfy for remote islands;
20. Calls on the Commission particularly to examine the impact of climate change on island regions and, especially, the exacerbation of existing problems, such as drought, and to promote, in cooperation with the Member States, the development and application of appropriate technologies or other measures to tackle these problems;
21. Calls on the Commission to re-examine the conditions relating to public contracts concerning transport in order to eliminate any obstacles in respect of obligations to provide a public service so as to facilitate transport links with island regions;

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22. Calls on the Commission to give priority to the energy security of the islands and to funding for the development and implementation of projects for the production of energy using new technologies and renewable energy sources and to promote efficient use of energy, whilst protecting the environment and preserving its natural beauty;

23. Encourages island communities to make use of Euroregions or similar European networks for the management of inter-regional cooperation, the exchange of good practice as well as for developing cross border projects and better integration of the island communities into their surrounding economic areas;

24. Encourages island communities to make use of the Jaspers (Joint Assistance in Supporting Projects in European Regions) and Jeremie (Joint European Resources for Micro to Medium Enterprises) financial and management facilities, in order to exploit the available regional development resources and to foster the growth of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises encouraging diversification of island economies and promoting core growth through sustainable development; further encourages the implementation, at local, regional, national and European levels, of the 'better legislation' initiative with a view to, inter alia, simplifying administrative requirements, notably as far as the submission and the evaluation of applications for financial aid are concerned;

25. Acknowledges the positive result achieved as regards the implementation, for the first time, of European Resources for Border Controls and welcomes the recent Commission proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a mechanism for the creation of Rapid Border Intervention Teams (COM(2006)0401), with the purpose of providing swift operational and technical assistance to any Member State requesting it; believes, however, that the activities of such teams will only be effective if they have a remit defined with due reference to the remit of a European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex); urges the Commission to examine the need for the creation of a European coastguard body to assist, in parallel, those regions and the Member States in monitoring the EU's external borders;

26. Reiterates its support for the initiatives and activities undertaken by Frontex and requests that it monitor, on an ongoing basis, the impact of illegal immigration on island communities; calls on the Commission and on Frontex to take prompt action in support of islands so as to alleviate the immediate pressure to deal with this problem whilst ensuring due respect for human rights; calls on the Council and the Commission to ensure that the requisite resources are made available for fast and effective action; emphasises, further, the importance of stronger and closer coordination and cooperation between the islands, and the need for greater involvement on the part of these regions in combating illegal immigration;

27. 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, such as health care and online medical services, electronic governance and citizens' services;

28. Considers that tourism represents for most islands a primary source of wealth creation, having a direct influence on the growth of other sectors (agriculture, commerce, services, fisheries), and that it is imperative to put in place an integrated policy capable of ensuring the sustainability of island tourism; believes that this policy needs to be accompanied by a well-organised European information campaign directed at European citizens through the creation of a quality and island origin label, and the emergence or further development of other activity sectors within islands; calls on the Commission, with this in view, to carry out a cross-sectoral analysis paying special attention to opportunities to support sustainable tourism within the regional strategies of islands that are far from centres of population;

29. Proposes that the Commission and the other Institutions designate the year 2010 as the European year for the islands;

30. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.
