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Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2015/2324(INI)	Procedure completed
EU strategy for the Alpine region		
Subject 4.70.05 Regional cooperation, cross-border cooperation		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	 Regional Development	 BRESSO Mercedes	17/09/2015
		Shadow rapporteur	
		 SCHMIDT Claudia	
		 SERNAGIOTTO Remo	
		 JAKOVČIĆ Ivan	
		 ŠKRLEC Davor	
		 ZULLO Marco	
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	 Employment and Social Affairs	 LAVRILLEUX Jérôme	18/01/2016
 Environment, Public Health and Food Safety	 BRIANO Renata	26/11/2015	
 Industry, Research and Energy	The committee decided not to give an opinion.		
 Transport and Tourism	 AIUTO Daniela	20/10/2015	
 Agriculture and Rural Development	 MÜLLER Ulrike	18/11/2015	
 Culture and Education	The committee decided not to give an opinion.		

Key events

28/07/2015	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2015)0366	Summary
26/11/2015	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
16/06/2016	Vote in committee		
13/07/2016	Committee report tabled for plenary	A8-0226/2016	
12/09/2016	Debate in Parliament		
13/09/2016	Results of vote in Parliament		
13/09/2016	Decision by Parliament	T8-0336/2016	Summary
13/09/2016	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information

Procedure reference	2015/2324(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 159
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	REGI/8/05067

Documentation gateway

Non-legislative basic document		COM(2015)0366	28/07/2015	EC	Summary
Committee draft report		PE580.480	30/03/2016	EP	
Committee opinion	ENVI	PE575.216	19/04/2016	EP	
Committee opinion	AGRI	PE577.050	26/04/2016	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE582.156	27/04/2016	EP	
Committee opinion	EMPL	PE575.287	02/05/2016	EP	
Committee opinion	TRAN	PE575.341	25/05/2016	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A8-0226/2016	13/07/2016	EP	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T8-0336/2016	13/09/2016	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2016)876	21/12/2016	EC	

EU strategy for the Alpine region

PURPOSE: to present an EU Strategy for the Alpine Region.

BACKGROUND: the Alpine Region is one of the richest areas in the world and among the economically most dynamic, innovative and competitive areas in Europe. However, it also faces important challenges requiring a joint response:

- economic globalisation that requires the territory to distinguish itself as competitive and innovative;
- demographic trends, characterised particularly by the combined effects of ageing, low population density in the mountain areas and new migration models;
- high vulnerability to climate change and its foreseeable effects on the environment,
- biodiversity and the living conditions of its inhabitants;
- the energy challenge in managing and meeting demand sustainably, securely and affordably;
- its specific geographical position in Europe, as a transit region;
- a high degree of seasonality, especially in some touristic areas.

The European Council of 19 and 20 December 2013 invited the Commission, working with

Member States, to draw up an EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) by June 2015, building on the solid background of cooperation in the region. The Strategy will affect around 80 million people living in 48 regions (map in Annex) in seven countries, of which five are EU Member States (Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia) and two are non-EU countries (Liechtenstein and Switzerland), being a macro-regional strategy for the sustainable development of the Alpine Region.

CONTENT : the Strategy will respond to the challenges above by covering the following thematic policy areas:

1. Fair access to job opportunities, building on the high competitiveness of the Region;
2. Sustainable internal and external accessibility;
3. A more inclusive environmental framework and renewable and reliable energy solutions for the future;

and a crosscutting objective, building a sound macro-regional governance model for the region to improve cooperation and the coordination of action.

Within each objective, a number of actions have been identified. These support EU policy objectives, including those with a territorial dimension.

1) Fair access to job opportunities: this objective focuses on improving the competitiveness, prosperity and cohesion of the Alpine region. The main actions are:

- develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem by stressing a system focusing on thematic issues of particular relevance to the region (such as agriculture and forestry, tourism, etc.);
- increase the economic potential of strategic sectors by supporting SMEs to maintain innovativeness and preserve a competitive edge by ensuring sustainable development (agriculture and forestry sector-based products and services);
- improve the adequacy of labour market education and training in strategic sectors by improving the right competences, and helping to cope with brain drain in remote areas that suffer from depopulation.

2) Sustainable internal and external accessibility: the aim is to improve the sustainability of transport connectivity within the region and with the rest of Europe by:

- promoting inter-modality and interoperability in passengers and freight transport (facilitating the achievement of the trans-European transport networks objectives and those of similar projects to shift traffic from road to rail);
- connecting people electronically and promote accessibility to public services (particularly land-based broadband connections).

3) A more inclusive environmental framework and renewable and reliable energy solutions for the future: this aims to:

- preserve the environmental heritage of the Alps;
- help the region benefit from its resources in various ways, including energy; and
- cope with the changes predicted due to climate change, including preventing major natural risks.

The main actions are:

- preserve and valorise natural resources, including water and cultural resources;
- develop ecological connectivity in the whole EUSALP territory (promotion of ecological corridors and green infrastructure, including in unprotected areas);
- improve risk management as regards climate change, and carry out a comprehensive vulnerability assessment of the sectors and systems likely to be affected and developing a regional strategy on adapting to climate change;
- make the territory a model region for energy efficiency and renewable energy.

A macro-regional governance model: implementing the Strategy requires:

- setting up an efficient governance model involving the actors taking part in implementation and strengthening cooperation and the coordination among other relevant institutions and stakeholders in the region; and,
- changing the decision-making process, avoiding fragmented governance, increasing knowledge sharing and coordination, both between different levels of government and across local government organisations at the same level.

Experience to date with macro-regional strategies shows that streamlined governance mechanisms are crucial for effective implementation. Sound governance requires that roles be clearly defined at an early stage: how and by whom the Strategy will be implemented, and how and by whom joint actions will be initiated and financed. Governance must have both a political and operational dimension, with political leadership and ownership, coordination; and implementation. The Commission will act as an independent facilitator.

Financing: as the Strategy does not have its own financing, it will mainly be implemented by mobilising and aligning existing EU and national funding relevant to the objectives and actions. In particular, relevant country-specific, cross-border and transnational programmes from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) for 2014-2020 can provide significant resources and a wide range of tools and technical options to support the Strategy. The trans-national Alpine Space programme will provide financial support for developing the governance arrangements for the Strategy.

The Strategy should focus on actions to identify supra-national priorities when choosing investment projects that could benefit from joint programming and cross-border coordination in the region.

Other EU funds and instruments relevant to the Strategy's objectives are available, notably with:

- Horizon 2020 (for all objectives);
- the COSME programme (for objective 1);
- the Connecting Europe Facility (for objective 2) and
- the LIFE programme (for objective 3).

Other funding is also available, particularly from the European Investment Bank.

A strong monitoring and evaluation system will be needed to check whether implementation of the Strategy is on track.

EU strategy for the Alpine region

The European Parliament adopted by 521 votes to 78 with 107 abstentions a resolution following the Commission communication concerning the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region.

Members welcomed the communication from the Commission and the accompanying action plan, while stressing that the macro-regional strategy for the Alps could help to reverse the economic decline through investment in research, innovation and business support, taking into account the region's unique characteristics and assets. The Alpine region plays an important role for the economic development of Member States and provides numerous ecosystem services for the urban and peri-urban areas adjoining it. The macro-strategy will affect 80 million people living in 48 regions in seven countries, of which five are EU Member States (Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia) and two are non-EU countries (Liechtenstein and Switzerland).

In this context, Parliament:

- called on Member States' competent authorities and the participating regions to align their national and regional policies and funding arrangements, wherever possible, to the actions and objectives of the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP);
- called on the European Investment Bank (EIB), in cooperation with the Commission, to examine the possibility of setting up an investment platform for the Alpine region that would enable mobilisation of funding from public and private sources;
- was in favour of setting up at macro-regional level of a supporting implementation structure for the governing bodies of EUSALP, in cooperation and agreement with the Commission, Member States and regions;
- suggested launching appropriate information campaigns regarding the EU strategy for the Alpine region.

Jobs, economic growth and innovation: Members made the following recommendations:

- ensure active synergistic cooperation between farming and other economic activities in protected areas (Natura 2000 sites, national parks, etc.), in order to develop integrated tourism products, as well as the importance of preserving and protecting the unique habitats of mountain regions;
- highlight the opportunities opened up by the strategy for the development of its labour market, which has different important levels of cross-border commuting, and further diversify economic activities and employment opportunities in the Alpine region;
- prioritise investment in digital infrastructures and ensure quick and efficient access to high-speed internet for people living in areas remote from large urban centres;
- encourage competent authorities of the Alpine Member States and regions to come together with the Commission to look into the feasibility of carrying out during the next programming period a joint programme to foster the integration of research and innovation activities in the Alpine area;
- provide opportunities to preserve, sustain, and adapt where necessary, forms of traditional economic activity, such as agriculture and forestry and craft-based economic activities, as well as fostering innovation and the development of new initiatives in this field;
- encourage the formulation of tourism strategies based on existing natural and cultural heritage, develop new tourism opportunities and promote the development of soft and sustainable touristic activities for the entire Alpine region, including in lake and spa towns;
- protect the Alpine heritage and promoting sustainable use of natural and cultural resources (environment, cross-border terrestrial habitats and biodiversity);
- support measures to help ease pressure on transport infrastructure.

Mobility and connectivity: Parliament called for a holistic approach to the future design and implementation of Alpine transport and environment policy. In this context, it underlined the need to prioritise modal transfers with a view to achieving a shift from road to rail, in particular for freight, and asks the Commission to support this transition.

The Commission and Member States should also:

- facilitate clean, low carbon and better connections, notably for rail networks, at regional and local level in order to enhance cohesion and quality of life in mountainous areas;
- facilitate better digital connections at regional and local level in order to enhance the quality of life and promote the development of new activities and the creation of job opportunities in these areas, and to encourage resettlement.

The environment, biodiversity, climate change and energy: concerned at the degradation of ecosystems and the risk of natural disasters in certain parts of the Alpine region, Parliament stressed the need to: (i) apply full natural disaster risk management and climate change adaptation strategies; (ii) develop and implement common contingency plans in response to cross-border pollution.

The resolution also recommended:

- joint efforts to introduce innovative measures for preserving and maintaining biodiversity;
- promoting the self-generation of energy, improving energy efficiency and supporting the development of the most efficient renewable energy sources in the region, and the development of forms of renewable energy specific to the Alps (such as solar and wind energy);
- making joint efforts to implement spatial planning and integrated territorial management.

The Commission was called upon to play an active role in the implementation phase of EUSALP, and to submit, every two years, a report on the implementation of EUSALP to the Parliament and the Council, based on objective criteria and measurable indicators.