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European Strategy for the Danube Region

European Parliament resolution of 21 January 2010 on a European 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 question of 3 December 2009 to the Commission on a European Strategy for the Danube Region (O-0150/2009 – B7-0240/2009),
 - having regard to the conclusions of the European Council of 18 and 19 June 2009, which called on the Commission to draw up a European strategy for the Danube region before the end of 2010,
 - having regard to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region,
 - having regard to the programme of the Council, prepared by the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies,
 - having regard to the Danube Forum set up within the European Parliament and the Forum's work,
 - 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 Opinion of the Committee of the Regions, entitled 'An EU strategy for the Danube area', of October 2009,
 - 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 the joint statement on 'Development of Inland Navigation and Environmental Protection in the Danube River Basin' adopted by the Danube Commission, the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) and the International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC),
 - having regard to the Stockholm Conference on macro-regional strategy held by the Swedish Presidency,
 - having regard to Rule 115(5) 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 the 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 and whereas an EU Danube Strategy, following the model of the Baltic Sea Strategy, has the potential to promote regional and cross-border cooperation for further economic growth and to identify joint responses to common challenges,
- D. whereas the Danube links ten European countries – Germany, Austria, the Slovak Republic, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine – six of which are EU Member States, and in a broader territorial context the region also comprises the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Montenegro,
- E. whereas the Danube region is an important crossover point between the EU's Cohesion Policy programmes, programmes for countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy and potential candidates for accession, and therefore represents an area where enhanced synergies between different EU policies can be developed: cohesion, transport, tourism, agriculture, fisheries, economic and social development, energy, environment, enlargement and neighbourhood policy,
- F. whereas an EU Strategy for the Danube Region is to be developed in the following cooperation areas: social development and protection, sustainable economic development, transport and energy infrastructure, environmental protection, culture and education,
- G. whereas the EU Strategy for the Danube Region could make an important contribution to the achievement of better coordination between regional and local authorities and organisations operating in the Danube region and would make for prosperity, sustainable development, job creation and security in the area,
- H. whereas there is a long history of cooperation in the Danube region: the European Commission for the Danube, founded on 30 March 1856 and originally based in Galați (Romania), was one of the very first European institutions, and is today based in Budapest,
- I. whereas the Danube has almost become an internal waterway of the European Union following the 2007 enlargement, and whereas the Danube Region may make a substantial contribution to fostering the developments which have taken place since that enlargement,
- J. whereas the Danube is an effective waterway even beyond the Member States and, together with the Main Canal and River Rhine, connects the North Sea with the Black Sea and has the potential to enhance the geostrategic position of the Black Sea region,
- K. whereas the Danube region represents an interconnected area with heterogeneous economic capacities and whereas considering the Danube area as a single macro-region would help to overcome the regional differences in economic performance and sustain integrated development,
- L. 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 framework of Natura 2000; 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,

1. Calls on the Commission to launch, as soon as possible, broad consultations with all countries along the Danube in order to cover various aspects of regional cooperation and to present the EU Strategy for the Danube Region no later than the end of 2010;
2. Considers that a European Strategy for the Danube Region represents an appropriate instrument for enhancing territorial development through intensified cooperation in clearly defined policy fields in which genuine European added value has been identified by all governmental partners, and calls for that strategy to be developed as part of the European Territorial Cooperation objective;
3. Stresses the imperative that any macro-regional strategy should be incorporated in the EU's regional policy, as a coordinated policy for the whole territory of the EU; furthermore, highlights the need to analyse the added value of this strategy for the implementation of the objective of territorial cohesion within the territory of the Union;
4. Stresses the need to involve the relevant regional and local stakeholders in the Danube region in the preparatory process, in order to clearly identify the needs, in terms both of balanced, sustainable development of territories and of capacity building, in order to find solutions to common challenges, to implement efficiently the concrete projects and to provide a good governance mechanism, and urges the governments to support and facilitate measures to inform and consult NGOs, trade associations and civil society in both the establishment of the strategy and its future implementation;
5. Calls on the Commission to clearly identify the 'governance structure' of a future Danube region policy; takes the view that implementation of this strategy must not impinge on the responsibilities of regional and local government;
6. Supports the economic and social development of the Danube region as an EU priority area and the promotion of deeper regional integration in the Danube region as a dynamic component of a wider European economic and political area;
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. Notes that responsibility for the pollution of the Danube region lies with both the Member States and the other riparian countries through which the Danube flows; stresses that protecting the environment in the Danube basin is an important aspect which will have a bearing on the agricultural and rural development of the region and urges riparian states to give top priority to the establishment of shared hydrological and water quality testing facilities;
9. Encourages the Commission and the Member States, in the framework of the fight against climate change, to pay special attention to, and cooperate in protecting, local ecosystems and urges the Commission to support research and development focusing on new technologies geared to enhancing forecasting and response capabilities in connection with

flooding, extreme drought and accidental pollution;

10. Underlines the need to protect and enhance fish stocks in the Danube; calls on the Commission to prepare a comprehensive plan for conserving and restoring the natural sturgeon stocks in the Danube;
11. Calls on the Commission to draw on the operational experience gained with the Baltic Sea Strategy; calls, accordingly, for an action plan to complement the document; is of the opinion that the Action Plan should include the following elements: environmentally friendly use of the Danube by inland navigation, intermodality with other transport modes along the Danube through the improvement of all infrastructures (with priority for the better use of existing infrastructure) and by creating a multi-modal transport system all along the river, environmentally-friendly use of water power along the Danube, preservation and improvement of Danube water quality in accordance with the Water Framework Directive, stringent vessel safety requirements, development of environmentally friendly tourism and improvements in the fields of education, research and social cohesion;
12. Stresses the need to diversify energy sources and calls on the Commission and all riparian states to increase cooperation in the field of energy, to promote and implement joint projects on energy efficiency and renewable energy resources, in the light of the region's potential as a source of bioenergy, and to encourage the use of biomass, solar, wind and hydro energy;
13. Underlines that proper strategic and environmental impact assessments, including assessments of effects on the entire ecosystems of the river, should be a prerequisite for all transport- and energy-related infrastructure projects, in order to guarantee that international standards of environmental protection are met, after consulting those partners which might be affected by those decisions;
14. Points out the exceptional economic interdependence of the states in the Danube region and supports the establishment of business development networks and non-governmental trade promotion bodies which can coordinate and promote future development opportunities, especially for SMEs, in order to ensure sustainable and efficient growth and to stimulate the growth of the green economy in the whole Danube macro-region;
15. Proposes the integration of the EU transport system with those of the EU's neighbouring countries in the Danube region and stresses the importance of making provision for co-modality projects;
16. Regards the inland waterway navigation system as an important aspect of the development of transport in the region, whilst recognising the decrease in inland navigation, which is mainly due to the strong economic downturn, and emphasises the importance of eliminating the bottlenecks on the Rhine/Meuse-Main-Danube waterway axis and improving the entire intermodal transport system along the Danube, while focusing on the combination between improved inland ports and logistics, inland navigation and rail transport and taking into account the additional possibilities of short sea shipping;
17. Proposes that the Trans-European Network be upgraded in order to improve intermodality in the whole region and increase connectivity with the Black Sea through road and railway routes (freight corridors and high-speed railway lines);
18. Calls on the Commission to foster more widespread use of modern communication and

information technologies and to take all necessary measures to achieve as swiftly as possible an efficient unified system of navigation rules on the Danube;

19. 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 cycle routes along almost the entire Danube;
20. Supports programmes aimed at improving the multicultural environment of the Danube by fostering multinational mobility, promoting cultural dialogue, generating forms of art and communication and of training and business incubator establishments in these sectors, and protecting the cultural and historical heritage as well as stimulating new cultural industries;
21. Supports university exchange programmes within the region and suggests that the universities in the region could form networks in order to foster centres of excellence capable of competing at international level;
22. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to improve administrative arrangements in order to lessen the administrative burden inherent in developing more effectively and implementing the EU Strategy for the Danube Region;
23. Calls on the Commission to work closely with it in defining the priorities for the development of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, and calls on the Commission to regularly inform and consult the European Parliament on the status of the implementation of this strategy;
24. Underlines the need for a coordinated approach aimed at more efficient and higher absorption of all available EU funds in the States along the Danube, in order to be able to fulfil the objectives of the Strategy;
25. Encourages the use of the existing Operational Programmes to finance projects under the strategy; urges all parties concerned also to explore other, non-financial instruments that would facilitate the implementation of the strategy and have an immediate positive effect on the ground;
26. Proposes that, following consultation with local and regional stakeholders, an EU Danube Summit be held every two years and its conclusions be presented to the European Council and Parliament;
27. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the other relevant institutions.