

On the strategy for the Outermost Regions: achievements and future prospects (19 May 2008)

Caption: On 19 May 2008, Danuta Hübner, European Commissioner responsible for Regional Policy, gives introductory and concluding remarks for the debate in the European Parliament on the Sudre Report concerning the strategy for the outermost regions.

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Commissioner for Regional Policy

Debate in the European Parliament
Plenary session

Report Sudre

"On the strategy for the Outermost Regions: achievements and future prospects (2008/2010 INI)"

19 May 2008

Introductory remarks

- Congratulations to Ms Sudre for a professional report and I direct a special thanks to her for her presence and involvement in our Outermost Regions conference last week. Thanks also to the Regional development and to the Fisheries committees (and its Rapporteur Mr Guerreiro) for the support to our common reflection on the future of the Strategy for the outermost regions. My gratitude also goes out to Mr Jardim Fernandes, Mr Marques and Mr Casaca, Members of this House, for sending written comments during the public consultation launched last September. This phase of public consultation has just ended with the conference last week.
- Before I comment on the report, allow me to report to you that the conference was not only the first of its kind but it was also a great success. Indeed, the possibility to confront views and the strong

involvement from the partners in the OR as well as colleagues in other DGs made for a very interesting conference.

- I take with me many ideas from this conference such as the challenge for the OR of a double integration – in the EU and in their neighbouring region. Or the OR serving as testbeds with pilot projects that can then be transferred to the mainland Europe for instance in renewable energy. And also how OR's autonomy in energy and food production are crucial for the future. Most of all, however, I take with me the firm conviction that the OR have a wealth of unique opportunities and that they represent a living force as well as a strength for the EU as a whole.
- Coming back to the report, I fully share the importance the Parliament attaches to the need to preserve a strategy specifically adapted to the characteristics and the assets of the outermost regions. In this context, I am ready to widen the scope of the strategy to new challenges. Clearly, the challenges identified: climate change, demographic change and migration management, agriculture and EU maritime policy are not exclusive and we are open to other ideas.
- I can also agree with Ms Sudre when she calls for an improvement in the coordination between the ERDF and the European Development Fund. I also believe it important to further integrate the outermost regions into the European Research Area as well as promoting cooperation with neighbouring countries. In this regard, the reformed cohesion policy has clearly helped not only to strengthen the position of the outermost regions under the cooperation objective but also, concretely, to make it possible to

finance up to 10% of the package allocated to cooperation projects based in territories which are not part of the EU.

- In addition, the "OR dimension", if I may call it in this way, has been safeguarded and intensified following the reform of many Community policies like the cohesion policy, the Agricultural and Rural Development, the regional state aid frameworks, the European POSEI programmes or the EU maritime policy.
- I am therefore somewhat more optimistic than the Rapporteur. I strongly believe that these policy developments correspond well to the needs of the outermost regions. Indeed, with the September 2007 Communication, we underlined the need to exploit all of the opportunities offered by the reforms during the current period 2007-2013. From my different visits to the outermost regions, I can ensure the members of the House that many initiatives have been taken in that direction. This is the basis for my optimism although I believe that these initiatives could be further developed.
- Where I also would like to convince the rapporteur of the efforts of the Commission, concerns the way in which the Commission conducted the Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations as well as the Emission Trading Scheme discussions. Allow me to be very clear on this. The OR have been an integral part of these discussions from the very start. The Commission has systematically informed but also involved the representatives of the outermost regions in the discussions. Several meetings and seminars were organised in the regions, in Brussels and in the Member States.

- Having said this, there is no room for complacency, and I can assure you that the Commission intends to continue taking account of the specific interests of the outermost regions in current but also future negotiations of this nature.
- Finally, the Commission is pleased with Parliament's recognition of the need to develop the strategy for the outermost regions in the light of important challenges that face us all in the near future. My intention is to produce a communication this autumn that will take the strategy forward, with decisiveness and pragmatism, to address new challenges and to grasp opportunities.
- Let me stop here for the moment. I could add some additional matters in the conclusive remarks after the debate.

III. Concluding remarks

- Thank you for this fruitful debate. I am delighted to see many of the points raised by the Commission in its Communication on the OR are taken on board in your draft resolution and that we share a similar opinion on priorities and future prospects.
- Above all, we agree on the positive role that the 2004 strategy for the outermost regions has played in helping to ensure that European policies create a more suitable framework for economic and social development. I fully understand that you would like to see more, and we in the Commission remain open to new ideas. In that way, I see your report as helping to build the bridges between present and future strategies for the outermost regions.
- I very much believe that the right way forward is to build on the assets of the outermost regions. The outermost regions have unique assets and development opportunities that should be promoted in the whole of the European Union, developing relationships beyond the three Member States most concerned.
- Let me end by mentioning also our future Green Paper on territorial cohesion which will be an essential feature of the French presidency. The Outermost Regions have a strong role to play in this: by defining the various facets of this concept, by giving their experience on territorial development under difficult conditions as well as their unique input on how to approach the change in economic development policies towards integrated and place-based approaches as well as towards multi-level, partnership-based mechanisms.

- I would say that the OR truly personify our efforts to bridge the territorial divides inside Europe. Therefore I would welcome their strong involvement.
- I know that I can count on your full and strong support as we move forward to reflect on future priorities for the strategy for the outermost regions. From our side, I can reassure you that that the Commission will continue to promote a coordinated approach and seek to achieve synergies between different community policies affecting the outermost regions.