Strategy for the outermost regions (12 September 2007)

Caption: The United Kingdom Parliament's Strategy for the outermost regions concludes that the EU's financial support to the outermost regions may affect the competitive position of these small, remote areas with which the UK has historic connections.

Source: United Kingdom Parliament. Strategy for the outermost regions. 12.09.2007.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/strategy_for_the_outermost_regions_12_september_2007-en-4b5e7031-51d3-41f6-a96b-2cd2bdb12b68.html

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11 Strategy for the outermost regions

(28957) 14838/07 COM(07) 507	Commission Communication: *Strategy for the outermost regions: achievements and future prospects*

Legal base	—
Document originated	12 September 2007
Deposited in Parliament	5 October 2007
Department	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Basis of consideration	EM of 15 November 2007
Previous Committee Report	None
To be discussed in Council	No date set
Committee's assessment	Politically important
Committee's decision	Cleared

Legal background

11.1 Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty states that the provisions of the Treaty are to apply to Madeira, the Azores, the Canary Islands, Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana and Réunion ("the outermost regions"). It also requires the Council — in the light of the adverse effect on the development of the outermost regions because of their remoteness, insularity, small size, difficult topography and climate and economic dependence on a few products — to adopt measures which set conditions for the application of the Treaty and EC policies to the outermost regions.

The 2004 strategy

11.2 In 2004, the Community approved a strategy to:

- alleviate the difficulties the outermost regions have in gaining access to European markets because of their geographical remoteness (the Commission calls this "the accessibility deficit");
- make them more competitive; and
- strengthen their integration in their regions.

The Communication

11.3 The Communication:

- gives the Commission's assessment of the implementation of the 2004 strategy so far;
- proposes measures for 2007-13; and
- invites views on questions about the EC's future strategy for the outermost

regions.

11.4 The Commission says that the assessment of the implementation of the existing strategy so far is encouraging. For example,

- money from the Cohesion Fund has been allocated to off-set the additional costs of the outermost regions;
- preferential treatment of the outermost regions has been included in the new guidelines on national regional aid; and
- the EC's 7th Framework Programme for R&D includes provision to "unlock the research potential in the outermost regions and to improve their integration into the European Research Space".[28]

11.5 The Commission says that it intends to redouble its efforts to implement the 2004 strategy between now and 2013. The action it has in mind includes:

- using existing EC programmes (such as the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the R&D Programme, and the Lifelong Learning Programme) to, for example: grant-aid research on matters relevant to the outermost regions; encourage the spread of broadband; help provide education and training systems in tourism, renewable energy, agriculture, the environment, transport and telecommunications; improve access to finance for SMEs; and help people prepare for and find employment;
- encourage cooperation between the outermost regions and neighbouring countries and, for example, take account of the particular interests of the outermost regions when negotiating Economic Partnership Agreements between neighbouring countries and the EC; and
- help the outermost regions to deal with the influx of migrants through financial support from the European Refugee, Integration and Return Funds.

11.6 The Communication invites views on a list of questions about four issues which may be important for the outermost regions in the longer term:

- climate change;
- demographic change and migration;
- agriculture; and
- the role of the outermost regions in EC maritime policy.

11.7 The Commission invites responses to the questions by the end of February 2008. It will then make a proposal on the future of the EC's partnership with the outermost regions.

The Government's view

11.8 The Minister for Europe at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Jim Murphy) tells us that the Government supports the 2004 strategy. He says that:

"Accelerated economic and social development in the Outermost Regions will increase the potential for trade and investment between the UK and these regions.

The proposals for reducing the 'accessibility deficit' and cohesion policy will create better investment conditions for UK businesses.

"This will also feed into the aims of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Development. There is also potential for research into renewable energy supplies (geothermal energy, wave energy, solar power and wind power) in these areas.

"We are particularly supportive of the proposals to support certain Member States, via the Integration Fund, to channel migratory flows from the Outermost Regions and the use of the External Borders Fund to modernise the Border Management Systems in the Azores, Canary Islands and Madeira."

Conclusion

11.9 **We draw this Communication to the attention of the House because the financial support from the EC to the outermost regions can affect the competitive position of places with which the UK has historic connections and which are small, remote and at an economic disadvantage. The document may be of particular interest to the Foreign Affairs Committee, which is conducting an inquiry into British Overseas Territories, and so we are sending them a copy.**

11.10 **We await with interest the proposal for a longer-term strategy that the Commission intends to present after the consultations have been completed. Meanwhile, we are content to clear the Communication from scrutiny.**

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28   Commission Communication, page 4, fourth bullet point in section 2. Back

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