

Outermost regions of European Union (25 October 2000)

Caption: The European Parliament addresses the issue of the implementation of Article 299(2) with a view to the definition of a comprehensive, coherent strategy for the sustainable development of the outermost regions by means of measures tailored to their unique situation and development needs.

Source: European Parliament. Outermost regions of European Union. European Parliament resolution on the measures to implement Article 299(2): the outermost regions of the European Union (COM(2000) 147 – C5-0247/2000 – 2000/2135(COS)), from Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC). 12.07.2001, No C 197, pp. 197-203.

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11. Outermost regions of European Union

A5-0285/2000

European Parliament resolution on the measures to implement Article 299(2): the outermost regions of the European Union (COM(2000) 147 – C5-0247/2000 – 2000/2135(COS))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission report (COM(2000) 147 – C5-0247/2000),
 - having regard to Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty on the outermost regions of the European Union,
 - having regard to Article 158 of the EC Treaty on economic and social cohesion,
 - having regard to paragraph 38 of the conclusions of the Cologne European Council (4 June 1999), paragraph 59 of the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council (24 March 2000) and paragraph 53 of the conclusions of the Feira European Council (20 June 2000),
 - having regard to its resolution of 24 April 1997⁽¹⁾ on development problems in the outermost regions of the European Union,
 - having regard to its resolution of 11 February 1999⁽²⁾ on relations between the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT), the ACP states and the outermost regions of the European Union,
 - having regard to the memorandum signed in Cayenne by the outermost regions (5 March 1999),
 - having regard to the memorandum issued by the Spanish Government: 'Canary Islands: conditions governing and procedures for the application of Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty' (7 November 1999),
 - having regard to the memorandum issued by the Portuguese Government: 'Memorandum by the Portuguese authorities on the outermost regions, the Azores and Madeira' (November 1999),
 - having regard to the French memorandum 'The overseas regions and Europe: French memorandum concerning the implementation of Article 299(2) of the Amsterdam Treaty' (10 December 1999),
 - having regard to the final declaration of the VIth Conference of the Presidents of the Outermost Regions, signed in Funchal on 31 March 2000,
 - having regard to Rule 47(1) of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism and the opinions of the Committee on Legal Affairs and the Internal Market and the Committee on Fisheries (A5-0285/2000),
- A. whereas the situation of the Azores, the Canaries, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Madeira, Martinique and Réunion is characterised by the cumulative and severe nature of their intrinsic handicaps, but also by inherent assets, which give the outermost regions a unique position within the European Union,
- B. whereas the situation of the outermost regions is based on five inherent characteristics:
- they form part of a dual geo-economic area, comprising, on the one hand, an immediate geographical area and, on the other, an area of political allegiance,
 - relative isolation, owing to their very great distance from the European continent, a factor compounded by their island status or surrounding natural constraints,
 - the very small local internal market, linked to the size of the population,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 150, 19.5.1997, p. 62.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 150, 28.5.1999, p. 439.

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- geographical and climatic conditions which limit the endogenous development of the primary and secondary sectors (lack of raw materials, status as part of an archipelago, active volcanoes, etc.),
 - economic dependence on a small number of products or even on a single product,
- C. whereas the seven outermost regions are permanently handicapped by the adverse effects of their characteristics and have to support additional costs by comparison with the rest of the Union; whereas this justifies an approach based on equal treatment for all regions but in terms proportionate to the particular situation of each region,
- D. whereas, therefore, any attempt to reduce the concept of 'outermost region' to that of 'peripheral' or 'island region', however much proximity and solidarity may unite them, would amount to taking an identical approach to different situations,
- E. whereas the establishment of the Interdepartmental Group attached to the Commission Secretariat is symbolic of the horizontal approach designed to lay down an appropriate framework for implementing the common policies for the outermost regions,
- F. whereas the recognition of the fact that the situation of the outermost regions cannot simply be equated with that of the other Union territories represents one of the fundamental benefits generated by the work of the Interdepartmental Group,
- G. whereas the aim of the Programmes of Options Specific to the Remote and Insular Nature of the Outermost Regions (POSEI), which came into force between 1989 and 1991 in all the outermost regions, is to enable those regions to play an active part in the dynamic of the internal market by means of a combination of multisectoral measures, including the adjustment of Community policies to the specific situation of the regions concerned, the introduction of specific measures designed to reduce the costs linked to their geographical situation, support for local products on regional markets and measures to improve the productivity of traditional export industries,
- H. whereas the Structural Funds, which were strengthened and radically overhauled in 1989, bear witness to the Union's solidarity with its less favoured regions, as reflected in the objective of economic and social cohesion established by the Treaties, but whereas their effectiveness is closely bound up with the implementation of a policy embracing all the outermost regions,
- I. whereas six of the seven outermost regions are still among the ten poorest regions of the Union, with a level of unemployment and underemployment more than twice as high as the Community average and a particularly young population,
- J. whereas, faced with the piecemeal development of the POSEI programmes, at a time when the approach should have been to encourage the institutions to enrich, broaden and adjust those programmes in a dynamic fashion, the Member States concerned and the authorities in the outermost regions, backed by the European Parliament, decided to use the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference to consolidate the legal bases which had been used to justify the specific treatment accorded to the outermost regions, to define precisely the concept of an 'outermost region' and to take account of the new challenges facing the Union, such as enlargement, globalisation, climate change, etc.,
- K. whereas the European Union's ability to assist the outermost regions has now been enhanced by Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty which grants the Community special powers to implement a Community policy for the outermost regions and also reflects the need to adopt derogations from the general Community regime,
- L. whereas Article 299(2) of the Treaty provides, in particular, for specific measures determining the conditions of application of the existing Treaty in the field of agriculture,
- M. whereas the European Council has, on a number of occasions, lent political impetus to the implementation of Article 299(2),

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- N. whereas, in the conclusions issued following its last meeting, held in Feira on 19/20 June 2000, the European Council called upon the Commission 'to study the information provided or to be provided by the Member States with a view to taking the measures falling within its sphere of competence, and to submit the appropriate proposals, which must be adopted at the earliest opportunity, to the Council as quickly as possible',
- O. whereas, when presenting the programme of the French Presidency of the European Union in Strasbourg on 4 July 2000, the President-in-office of the Council, Jacques Chirac, called for the new provisions of the Amsterdam Treaty to be implemented so that Azores, Madeira, the Canaries and the French overseas departments can benefit from the rights and advantages and the specific Community policies stemming from their specific characteristics and constraints,
- P. whereas in his opening speech at the partnership day with the outermost regions (23 November 1999), the President of the Commission stated that 'responsibility for coordinating the application of Community policies to the outermost regions has been assumed, since 1986, by the President of the Commission, since the approach to the outermost regions is not confined to one area of activity, but embraces all our policies: agriculture, fisheries, regional policy, taxation, competition, transport, energy, the information society, business policy and so on. I have taken up that responsibility with conviction and determination',
- Q. whereas the President of the Commission went on to say that the 'Interdepartmental Group, which reports directly to me, and in which all the departments concerned are represented, has played a key role for the last 13 years. I have asked it to continue, now that its role has been strengthened by the new Treaty article, to act as the advocate within the Commission of the approach based on the concept of 'outermost regions', to provide the degree of consistency required and to act as an interface for the national and regional authorities concerned',
- R. whereas, contrary to its undertakings and the unanimous and consistent calls voiced in the memoranda drawn up by the national governments and regional authorities, the Commission is gradually reducing the staff complement of the Interdepartmental Group and has failed to provide it with the authority it needs to carry out its work,
- S. whereas, in a departure running contrary to the coherent overall strategy for the sustainable development of the outermost regions from the approach laid down in its report of 14 March 2000, in its programme for the year 2000 presented to the Feira European Council the Commission chooses merely to consolidate certain established instruments, rather than working towards the introduction of a comprehensive policy,
- T. whereas most of the outermost regions are located near ACP countries which have similar productions; whereas this is an asset which should be built on, but also a source of additional competition,
- U. whereas enlargement, while essential for European integration, is also liable to lead to a reduction in the Community's average GDP with an impact on the regions currently eligible for Objective 1; whereas an enlarged Union will bring in its wake a representativeness deficit for the outermost regions in the Community institutions,
- V. whereas the state aids or tax concessions granted to the economies of the outermost regions, given their structural backwardness in development terms, are not of a nature to distort competition between Member States,
- W. whereas, further, the Commission's statements of intent set out in the guidelines for the Interreg III Community initiative programme will not at this stage enable the outermost regions to implement ambitious regional cooperation projects with their ACP partners, or other third countries, given that they have the same scope for action as the other regions, even though they are situated in fundamentally different geographical areas and their ambition is to become an 'active frontier' of the Union,
- X. whereas certain fragile natural environments require suitable measures to preserve them from the corrosive and degrading exploitation of various activities,

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- Y. whereas, although Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union is very clear about the protection of the rights and interests of Union citizens, in practice, and because of their remoteness, European citizens in the outermost regions are denied the chances and opportunities afforded to the citizens of continental Europe,
 - Z. having regard to the legitimacy of the efforts made by the outermost regions and their national and regional authorities to secure the implementation, on the basis of Article 299(2), of an effective Community policy for the outermost regions grounded in concrete operational measures and designed both to overcome their socio-economic backwardness *vis-à-vis* the other regions of the Union and to exploit the assets represented by their proximity to new regional cooperation areas (economic, ecological, social and cultural),
 - AA. whereas information is required concerning the accompanying funding for the implementation of the measures proposed in the Commission's report (COM(2000) 147) for 2000-2006,
1. Reiterates its complete support for the approach adopted by the European Union which has resulted in the development of a joint framework for assistance to the outermost regions based on the dual principle of allegiance to the Union and the acknowledgement of regional realities;

A global and coherent strategy

2. Takes the view that the implementation of Article 299(2) must move on to a new, decisive stage involving the definition of a comprehensive, coherent strategy designed to bring about the sustainable development of the outermost regions by means of measures tailored to their unique situation, taking due account of each region's individual development needs;
3. Reiterates that the main measures to assist the outermost regions must be defined on the basis of their geo-economic situation, viewing it as an asset rather than a constraint, employing an approach geared to the development of the entire Union territory, to the mutual benefit of regional development and the Community as a whole;
4. Regrets that fact that the Commission report has not yet dealt satisfactorily with all the issues raised by the outermost regions and their national authorities with a view to transforming the new legal basis into a strategy for action and thereby taking a genuine qualitative step forward; calls on the Commission, therefore, to provide the replies which are being sought as quickly as possible;
5. Takes the view that Article 299(2) represents a legal basis for the adoption of measures designed to assist the outermost regions, and proposes in this connection that the derogations granted to those regions should not be subject to time-limits where the handicaps concerned are clearly multiple and permanent;
6. Considers that the measures adopted are justified in view of the permanent nature of the handicaps facing these regions, and must not be subject to exclusions or modifications for circumstantial reasons, other than by simply varying the terms of application;
7. Believes that specific adaptations of the common policies must be developed where the outermost regions are heavily dependent on a limited number of economic activities or even on a single economic activity, in conformity with Article 299(2) of the Treaty;

Implementation of Article 299(2)

8. Regards it as essential that the staff complement of the Interdepartmental Group within the Commission's General Secretariat should be strengthened without delay and that the presence of this Group in each of the directorates-general should be consolidated so that it forms a genuine point of contact, both dynamic and imaginative, capable of taking account of the potential and specific characteristics of the outermost regions in each area of Union responsibility;

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9. Urges, with a view to enhancing the consistency of the measures implemented to assist the outermost regions, and, more particularly, against the current background of restricted financial resources, that all proposals for acts which are general in scope should be accompanied, when they are considered by the College of Commissioners, and on the basis of Article 299(2), by a simplified sheet, drawn up by the Interdepartmental Group, outlining their possible impact on the outermost regions and the remedial measures required should that impact prove adverse;

10. Welcomes the fact that the Commission has published its work programme for the next two years; wishes, nonetheless, to see more emphasis on the multiannual dimension, as well as a more detailed timetable and guarantees concerning the resources necessary for proper implementation;

11. Takes the view that a comprehensive and lasting policy to assist the outermost regions must be based, on the one hand, on support for the production sector and the development of firms and services (in particular SMUs, the craft sector, tourism, etc., with support for the enlargement of markets to take in new activities), and, on the other, on measures to bring these regions up to speed in the strategic areas constituted by the information society, the environment, transport, energy and new technologies;

Agriculture

12. Calls on the Union to adapt the common organisations of the market (COMs) and other support measures for agricultural production to the specific features of production in the outermost regions, especially in the case of those COMs which most directly impinge on farming and stockbreeding (bananas, fruit and vegetables, dairy products, beef, sheepmeat and goatmeat, sugar, wine, etc); believes that this adaptation should mark a further step in the direction mapped out by the various implementing regulations for the agricultural measures under the POSEI programmes, while also introducing measures relating to the specific features of the outermost regions into the COMs currently being reformed;

13. Considers it essential, in the process of reform of the implementing regulations for the agricultural measures under the POSEI programmes, to improve the implementation of the specific supply regimes in such a way as to introduce a new method for calculating aid, achieve a better balance with the support measures for local production, and facilitate the introduction of more flexible conditions for the re-exporting of products;

14. Expresses its concern at the delay in the submission of the Commission's proposals for the revision of the agricultural provisions of the POSEI programmes and the restrictive concept which may be incorporated into them; urges, in that connection, that the budget estimates for covering the review of the agricultural sections of the POSEI programmes should be increased so that traditional forms of production in the outermost regions can continue to receive support under these programmes;

Fisheries

15. Urges the Commission, in the context of the future debate on reform of the common fisheries policy, to allow the application of specific measures in the outermost regions with respect to, inter alia: the indefinite maintenance of the arrangements for compensation of excess marketing costs for certain fisheries products, leaving room for possible adaptations; specific treatment for the fleets of those regions in the context of FIFG funding; implementation of a policy of fisheries resource prospection for those regions; and extension and prolongation of the special regimes for the import of fisheries products which are not found in those regions;

16. Calls on the Commission to submit proposals to support the coastal fishing sector of these areas and the development of craft fishing and conservation techniques;

Regional policy and state aid

17. Believes it is essential to undertake, as of now, in-depth studies of the potential impact of the forthcoming enlargements and of the conclusion of the new ACP-EU partnership agreement on economic and social cohesion within the existing Fifteen, with a view to ensuring there is no questioning of the agreed aids to the outermost regions or the implementing measures in respect of Article 299(2);

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18. Believes that the seven outermost regions should be treated at least as well as the Community regions which derive most benefit from the Structural Funds, and this should be reflected in co-financing rates, amount of aid, eligibility, etc.; that this is justified not only by the amount of financial support needed by the regions in question but also by the importance of their having access to the widest range of instruments available; that access to all Community initiatives should be kept open; that it makes no sense for the outermost regions to be excluded from the best-funded section of Interreg III and for procedures to be imposed on them which do not take into account their remoteness and which are designed for the mainland parts of the EU; that the outermost regions require a specific approach within Interreg III and coordination with the financial instruments applicable to third countries should be facilitated; that access by the outermost regions to horizontal Community programmes should also be promoted;

19. Draws the Commission's attention to the financial consequences of enlargement, and proposes that eligibility under Objective 1 of the Structural Funds should no longer be decided using GDP as the sole criterion, but should take account of geographical and demographic factors, as well as social indicators;

20. Deplores the fact that Community instruments (horizontal programmes, Community initiative programmes, etc.) are tailored solely to the needs of regions belonging to the European continent, disregarding the specific situation of the outermost regions, which form an interface with economic and political areas whose influence is set to grow during the 21st century (Caribbean region, Indian Ocean, Mercosur, Africa, etc.) and which therefore deserve recognition for their key role as an active frontier of the European Union; believes there should be a specific policy for those regions in the context of these instruments, to ensure that they can make effective use of them;

21. Requests that, in the case of state aids, the outermost regions should be able to benefit from the derogation provided for under Article 87(3) (a) of the Treaty, in line with the proposals made in the 'memorandum of the regions'; believes that, on the basis of Article 299(2), the specific fiscal status of each of the outermost regions should be maintained, since the consolidation of the existing benefits accruing from their outermost status is crucial if a more global approach is to be envisaged in the future;

Fiscal and customs regimes

22. Urges that the differentiated tax regimes of these regions, for both direct and indirect taxation, should be considered as necessary instruments for the economic development of the outermost regions, and should therefore be maintained with a view to achieving the objective of preserving a degree of economic diversity via sectoral promotion;

23. Believes that the customs and trade provisions specific to these regions must be further developed so as to ensure their effectiveness as regards the goals of reducing raw material supply costs for industry and respecting traditional trade patterns; considers that the EU must pay particular attention to the interests of the outermost regions when negotiating trade agreements with third countries;

24. Considers it essential to maintain the duty-free arrangements in respect of imports of certain products of particular sensitivity for the economies of these regions; calls on the Commission to authorise the re-exporting of duty-free raw material imports which have been processed in the outermost regions, in the interests of those regions' economic development;

Transport, energy and the environment

25. Urges the Commission to proceed with the adaptation of the public service obligations for transport services, to undertake a proper analysis of the potential impact of energy and transport market liberalisation on the outermost regions, and to continue with its efforts to integrate these regions' projects in both sectors into the trans-European networks;

26. Believes no restrictions must be placed on state aid to ports and airports in those regions where such facilities constitute essential public services;

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27. Believes that greater energy self-sufficiency must be achieved for the outermost regions, notably via the use of renewable energies;

28. Believes that application of the 'polluter pays' principle must be moderated or compensated for by means of greater flexibility in the environmental aid scheme; likewise specific measures must be adopted in the field of conservation and the elimination of solid waste, because of the richness and diversity of the natural environment and the fact that these are island regions;

Equal opportunities

29. Regards it as essential that greater efforts should be made to foster equal opportunities for the citizens of the outermost regions (in particular young people, women and the unemployed), for universities, for firms (so that they secure access to markets and funding for their projects), for civil society and NGOs, or for regional centres focusing on innovation, training and technological development;

Illegal immigration

30. Urges the Union to take account of the problem of illegal immigration in the outermost regions, all of which constitute external borders of the Union and, hence, points of entry on to its territory;

Partnership

31. Welcomes the holding by the Commission of the first partnership days; calls for them to be developed into a Monitoring Committee, comprising representatives of the Member States concerned and the outermost regions, which would carry out annual scrutiny in the context of that partnership; urges, further, that a forum for dialogue, broadened to include Members of the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions and representatives of social and professional groups, should meet every year, alternately in Brussels and one of the outermost regions, with a view to assessing the progress made in the implementation of Article 299(2) and submitting proposals for adjustments to Community policies as and when they are drawn up;

32. Calls on the Commission to draw up an annual report on the progress achieved in the detailed implementation of Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty;

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33. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the national, regional and local authorities of the outermost regions.

12. Food safety

A5-0272/2000

European Parliament resolution on the Commission White Paper on food safety (COM(1999) 719 – C5-0136/2000 – 2000/2082(COS))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission White Paper (COM(1999) 719 – C5-0136/2000),
- having regard to its resolution of 10 March 1998 on the Commission Green paper on the general principles of food law in the European Union (COM(1997) 176 – C4-0213/1997)⁽¹⁾,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 104, 6.4.1998, p. 60.