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The Regions in the EU maritime policy

EDITORIAL

STATE AIDS AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FOR EU ISLANDS

Tourism is a major source of income for the coastal areas of the European Union, the more so in the many islands where it tends to be the dominant industry. While precise data is hard to quote, it is obvious that the share of "island tourism" against European tourism as a whole is comparatively much higher than the proportion of islanders with regards to the European Union's population (less than 3%). The islands' contribution to the EU tourism economy must therefore be underlined.

However, the prosperity brought by the tourism industry in the islands is relative because profits arising from tourism do not necessarily remain in the islands, especially when this industry is largely in the hands of large tourist operators who re-export its proceeds. Moreover, even when profits arising from tourism remain in the island, they are seldom reinvested in other industries since the tourism-related activities tend to be more profitable by far. This leads many island economies to be increasingly dependant on tourism, with little other alternative, and henceforth highly vulnerable to its market's fluctuations.

Unlike profits, the costs related to tourism remain in the islands. Generally, they have to be dealt with by the local community and the local and regional authorities. Such costs, which are well known, may be connected to the environmental damages or the cultural pressure, but also, more directly, they could be related to the provision of transport, health, water, sewage, or energy services. Of course, all these points are not strictly island specific, but they affect the islands with special intensity. Because of the islands' limited dimension, of the extra-costs arising from their isolation, of their lack of economy of scale, the provision of infrastructure and services tend to be higher in islands than on the mainland.

In the context of the European Union legislation, unfortunately there is no specific reference to tourism in the existing consolidated Treaty, no specific budget, and reduced involvement by the European Commission. However, tourism is directly affected by numerous EU legislations and policies, such as transport, health, environment, taxation, or regional policy. Nonetheless, tourism gets limited recognition in Community

policies. The Green Paper on the EU future maritime dimension, as an example, underlines the importance of tourism for the economy of the coastal regions, and emphasizes its importance for the islands!

What specific measures supporting sustainable tourism development in coastal regions and islands should be taken at EU level?

First of all we believe that a special attention should be paid to the fact that the implementation of such measures in islands tends to be more costly because of the extra-cost arising from insularity. Therefore, other measures aiming at the modernisation of tourism infrastructure, while sustaining the natural environment and capacity of the areas, should be provided via the Structural Funds.

Regarding the measures that should be taken, we can point out that there is still regrettably a dearth of reliable, comparable and consistent data related to tourism in the European Union, which is a major obstacle to a sustainable tourism policy. It is henceforth proposed that, whether in the framework of the ESPON (European Spatial Planning Observatory Network) project, or through any other suitable undertaking, the European Commission initiate a proper data collection effort to remedy this situation.

The second measure is linked to their accessibility. Islands have, by definition, a limited choice of transports: the options being limited to sea and air transport for those islands which are close to Europe, to air transport only in the case of outermost regions. While the islands are especially aware of the threats arising from global warming, and while they strongly support the Community's effort to cut down CO² emissions, they cannot but view with extreme concern the possibility of an increased taxation of aviation fuel. Because of the lack of alternatives, they fear that such a policy would have a devastating consequence not only for their residents, but also for the tourist industry upon which they depend so heavily.

However the most important measure is for us the EU State Aids. The paradox of islands is that while the tourist industry is a key element of their development, at the same time its unbridled growth is a source of real or potential dangers. Indeed, there are two kinds of risks: those associated with the lack of diversification which makes the island's economy extremely vulnerable and those related to the disappearance of a number of traditional activities, usually in the primary sector, which are fundamental to maintain the fragile island's environment and cultural identity. It is henceforth suggested that the EU State Aids legislation takes on board the islands' pressing needs for economic diversification, and implement corresponding measures in the various relevant legislation. This may require an innovative approach, with across-the-board measures affecting the different areas of economic activity, thus cutting through the traditionally sectoral approach of State Aid legislation.

Jean Didier HACHE
Executive secretary - CPMR Islands Commission

CROATIA CONTRIBUTES TO THE EUROPEAN POLICY OF THE SEA

Vesna Loncaric works for the Croatian Parliament as the Secretary of the European Integration Committee which monitors the harmonisation of the legal system of the Republic of Croatia with that of the European Union. It co-operates with the European Parliament and the European Affairs committees in the member states. The Committee is also regularly informed about the implementation of the EU pre-accession assistance instruments for Croatia.

Vesna Loncaric attended our meeting of Maritime policy in Livorno on 6th November 2006 and she found the activity of CPMR extremely interesting particularly in the European Maritime policy issues. *I believe that the maritime regions are the right partners for the EU to provide their constructive contribution to the Green paper on Maritime Affairs during the consultation process*, she said.

Ms Loncaric, how important is Maritime policy for Croatia?

Just as the maritime policy becomes a strategic priority for the EU, it is equally vital for Croatia, which is an Adriatic and Mediterranean country with the very long coastline and with more than 1000 islands and islets (out of which 66 are inhabited). Therefore maritime sectors and the marine resources represent, not only our tradition, but are logical vocation and important orientation for Croatia's economy and its development. This is especially true in the sectors of tourism, transport, shipping, fisheries and environment.

Do you think that Croatia can play an important role in the European maritime policy although it is a not an EU Member State?

Croatia is currently fully engaged in the accession negotiations process. That is a clear priority for the Croatian Government, underpinned by the strong political and parliamentary consensus.

In the framework of those efforts we are closely following the developments in the EU maritime policy and we are analyzing the existing acquis. We are also carefully observing the public debate taking place about the Commission's Green Paper launched in June and our presence today in Livorno is a proof of Croatia's active approach and interest towards maritime policy.

Do you think that Croatia once it will join the EU will be an "engine" for the maritime policy in the EU?

Knowing that sea represents a significant part of Croatia's identity, I believe that our experts and policy makers will certainly provide a relevant contribution to the elaboration of the EU's maritime policy. We will be ready to put forward our experience and ideas. I think that we could expect a valuable input by the most concerned, that is the representatives of the Croatian coastal counties and cities, who are already working on various schemes of interregional co-operation with their counterparts in the other Adriatic countries.

Enrico MAYRHOFER

THE BALTIC SEA IS THE NEW MARE NOSTRUM

Since the Baltic Sea has almost become an internal sea of the European Union, we may refer to the Baltic Sea as Romans used to call “their” Mediterranean Sea: MARE NOSTRUM!.

Indeed, except for Russia, the other eight countries surrounding the Baltic Sea are now members of the EU. Together, they have 147 million people and are represented in the European Parliament by 228 Members. Moreover, this area has, strategically speaking, become very important for the European Union in terms of the cooperation with Russia, our largest energy supplier.

On 18th November, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the *Baltic Sea Strategy for the Northern Dimension*¹ written by Finnish member Alex Stubb. This document underlines the importance of the Northern maritime dimension and recommends cleaning up one of the most polluted seas in the world.

The same issues were also recently approached by the 7 largest islands of the Baltic Sea, Bornholm (Denmark), Gotland (Sweden), Hiiumaa (Estonia), Rügen (Germany), Saaremaa (Estonia), Åland (Finland) and Öland (Sweden) that in 1989 began a cooperation called B7 (www.b7.org).

In this respect, this network met on 21 and 22 November last for their Annual Conference in Mariehamn, in the Finnish Autonomous Region of Åland to discuss “Maritime Strategies and Sustainable Islands”. About 50 participants from all the B7 Islands, and from organisations such as the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Union of Baltic City (UBC) and the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Co-operation (BSSSC), attended the meeting.

The two-day conference was held in the Åland Parliament building in Mariehamn at the invitation of Britt Lundberg, Minister of Åland and President of the B7. During the sessions the participants expressed their propositions and their expectations of the Maritime Policy Green Paper to Haitze Siemers Senior Administrator at the European Commission, in the DG Fisheries Maritime Policy Unit. The speakers provided a good foundation for discussion and also made significant contributions to the current consultation process on maritime issues, which started with the launch of the Green Paper.

The 7 Islands’ Governors expressed their common wish to meet Joe Borg, European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs, before the end of the consultation process to underline the importance of the Baltic area in the frame of an integrated European Maritime Policy and furthermore to establish a real dialogue between Regions and the European Commission. Indeed, Regions can certainly contribute with their experiences to feed into the EU Green Paper on a series of policies such as fisheries, transport, research, ports, and environment.

Enrico MAYRHOFER

¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2006-0494+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

FOR THE EUROPEAN MARITIME ECONOMY CONFERENCE

The French daily publication, *Les Echos* and the weekly *Le Marin* organised the second Convention on Sea Economy, which was held in Paris on 5 and 6 December. Close to 200 maritime personalities – industrialists, researchers, fishermen ... – and representatives of the State and French Regions were present. Mr Joe Borg, the European Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, who was also present, underlined the importance of the European Maritime Policy Green Paper for France, and invited participants to respond to the Green Paper consultation which ends on 30 June 2007.

“After the Green Paper, what is to be expected from an integrated Maritime Policy?” Such was the question posed to the first panel of the conference. Xavier de la Gorce, Secretary General of Maritime Affairs (France), Philippe Louis-Dreyfus, General Manager of Louis-Dreyfus Group, Francis Vallat, President of the French Maritime Cluster, and Jean-Yves Perrot, Chief Executive Officer of the French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea (Ifremer), exchanged views on the subject. At the dinner-debate, Jean-Yves le Drian, President of the Region of Brittany, called on John Richardson, Director of the Maritime Affairs Task Force to create an ambitious Maritime Policy.

Devoted to the theme “Sea and Regions”, the second day gave the opportunity for several Vice-Presidents of French Regions to call for a better governance of maritime aspects in France and to exchange their numerous and varied experiences, particularly in terms of integrated coastal management.

One month after the Maritime Governance seminar held in Livorno, the CPMR, represented by its Vice-President, Jean-Yves le Drian, and by Yves Morvan, President of the Administrative Council and Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council of Brittany, reminded participants that the majority of maritime problems overlap on a territory, at what is often an intermediary point between local and national levels, and that consequently the Regions have a major role to play in their management.

A truly successful event, which merits being repeated on a European scale - why not as of next year?

Julie GOURDEN
Co-operation Officer

THE MARITIME REGIONS AND THE COMMON FISHERIES POLICY 2007-2013

Over the last two years the CPMR and the DG for Fisheries have organised a series of inter-regional conferences in anticipation of the next programming period (2007-2013) and in particular in preparation for the introduction of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF), adopted in July 2006. These meetings, attended by national Fisheries Ministers and representatives of the CPMR's Geographical Commissions, have addressed such issues as the development of the EFF's axis 4, "sustainable development of fisheries areas" in operational programmes, how to promote innovative actions in the fisheries sector, and the future of organic aquaculture. Professionals from the fisheries sector, project partners and local representatives have been among the other participants.

This multi-level representation has favoured a balanced dialogue. The determination to promote an integrated approach, which underpins the initiative, is not one hundred percent guaranteed in the fisheries sector, in which individualism remains marked and which is having to face growing difficulties.

The main objectives of the meetings are to provide the necessary clarifications for the various partners who will be responsible for applying the new EFF measures so as to ensure that these will be in line with the aims of the Regulation, and to propose tools and methods enabling the sector to benefit from relevant input from other policies. They also provide an opportunity for exchanges of best practice and experience.

This programme of conferences is taking place over three years, ending in February 2008. Further information on the topics addressed as well as presentations made and minutes of the meetings are available on the web site of DG Fisheries and Maritime Affairs:
http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/meetings_events/events_en.htm

François DESRENTES
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