

Conference
Islands in Cohesion Policy
How to take into account specific characteristics of islands
European Parliament- Strasbourg
10.03.2016

***THE SOUTH AEGEAN REGION:
THE GREAT PATIENT OF COHESION POLICY***

Dear Members of the European Parliament,
Dear Mrs. President of Regional Policy,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by saying that the Regional Governor of South Aegean, Mr. George Chatzimarkos, sends his regards and sincere thanks to all of you who stand fighting by our side, so that islands have an equal standing within the EU Cohesion Policy.

A policy that unfortunately has not taken into account insularity and the specific problems that derive from it. Not to mention the interregional and intraregional inequalities that exist both within and between regions.

The South Aegean Region is without a doubt the very definition of insularity. It includes 79 islands, of which 50 are inhabited and of which 39 (three quarters) have a population smaller than 3.000 inhabitants; not including the multitude of islets that exist within this archipelago.

The great distances that exist between the islands, both from the seat of the region and the capital of the country, constitute a “**triple insularity**”, which leads to increased demands for spacial, financial and social cohesion.

A classic example: An inhabitant of Kasos who needs to travel to the seat of the region, Syros, will have to travel over 20 hours, at a high cost (about 250€) and, of course, will need to do so only when transport is available, which, especially in the winter season, is very sparse. (The Odyssey of an Islander)

S. AEGEAN REGION: NEEDS IN BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE

What is considered as a given in a continental area cannot be implemented in our region. We cannot take advantage of any economies of scale and an infrastructure in one island cannot have a direct impact in the development of the others.

Let us suppose that the SAR was geographically unified, like the region of Crete that consists of one island; its needs in infrastructure would be much smaller

The slides (appearing now) show that we need, as an archipelagic Region, a set of basic infrastructures for every single one of our 50 inhabited islands as we would need, in terms of Public Services,

(1 hospital, 1 power plant, 1 airport, 4 sanitary landfills, etc)

Additional **resources** are necessary, also because of the increased cost in construction and business, which **trebles** due to the distance from the metropolis.

SOUTH AEGEAN REGION AMONG THE MOST DEVELOPED REGIONS

A **gross injustice** has been imposed against our region in the last decade, due to the **leveling statistic** that considers **only** the average regional GDP as a measure of prosperity.

What does this mean?

- S Aegean was in **Target 1 in 2000-2006**
- We fell under **Target 2** in 2007-2013, as the per capita GDP of the five bigger and well-known islands (**Rhodes, Kos, Santorini, Mykonos and Naxos**), increased the total regional GDP,
- In 2014-2020, this injustice continued, and categorized us among the **More Developed Regions**

This basically diminishes the EU cohesion policy in our islands, as the less developed islands (**45 in number!**) are not considered at all!

Additionally, the South Aegean Region is the European region with the highest reduction of the per capita GDP, at a dramatic -35 % from 2010 to 2013, according to the latest Eurostat figures (2014).

That means that if these latest statistics are used to calculate eligibility for Structural funds, our region should change category to **Transition Region**, bordering on the **Less Developed Region category (by 1%)**.

If we take into consideration the uncontrolled influx of migrants to our islands and the abolition of the Special VAT status (reduced by 30% for products and services, as stipulated by article 17 of the law 1642/1986), then the S. Aegean should be categorized as a Less Developed Region.

How can cohesion policy help islands?

- ❖ **By reviewing the European region categorisation (as analysed earlier)**
- ❖ **By providing concrete support to European islands for the realization of the EU2020 targets**
- ❖ **By distributing equally the resources from all the Structural funds (5) to the Regional Operational Programmes and**
- ❖ **By implementing the Insularity Clause in all European and national policies**

Despite the fact that insularity has a legal basis both at an EU level through the Lisbon Treaty and at a national level **in Greece, in practice** the insularity clause is still a requisite, **is it not?**

The moral basis for a fair insular policy in the framework of our Cohesion Policy should be based on the dictum: "**Treat equals equally and unequals unequally in proportion to their differences**", which simply means that when one treats in an equal way those that are not equal, this leads to a violation of the Principle of Equality.

Thank you for your attention.

Eleftheria Ftaklaki

Councillor of S.Aegean Region-
Responsible for European Affairs