



## Resolution 1441 (2005)<sup>1</sup>

# Development challenges in Europe's islands

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Europe's islands are home to over 14 million people and almost 80 million if island-states are included. Their size, geographical location, proximity to the mainland, resources, demographic trends, degree of autonomy and overall level of development vary enormously. As peripheral and often rather isolated regions, islands and their inhabitants face multiple development challenges which are all the more real against the background of global competition and the need to preserve unique local identities, traditions and landscapes.
2. It is now increasingly recognised that islands deserve distinctive treatment due to special socio-economic development constraints, such as limited local resources and markets, often precarious and costly transport links with the mainland, higher living costs and a vulnerable natural environment. The European Union, whose member states are particularly rich in islands, has recognised the need to better link insular regions with the mainland, foster island development with a view to reducing disparities between regions and remedy the "permanent structural handicaps" of island regions. It has set up assistance to islands through the MEDA projects in the Mediterranean, structural and regional funds, the Common Agricultural Policy and programmes for the outermost territories. However, following the recent EU enlargement, the allocation of aid to islands may undergo major changes.
3. As the vast majority of Europe's islands depend for their livelihood on only a few economic activities or essentially only one (often referred to as "mono-activity") – be it fisheries, mainly in the north, or tourism, especially in the Mediterranean and other southern islands – their exposure to fluctuations in global markets, and hence their vulnerability, is particularly pronounced. Greater diversification of insular economies and a more rational use of local resources (both natural and human) therefore become vital.
4. The Parliamentary Assembly believes that in this context sustainable development represents the best strategy for integrating islands into European and global markets, by maintaining a balance between economic efficiency, social equity and environmental conservation.
5. Tourism remains one of the most important economic sectors in most island regions. If developed in a sound manner that makes the best possible use of limited island resources, tourism can provide a sustainable livelihood to local populations. This implies, however, striking the right balance between the qualitative and quantitative aspects of tourism development. The Assembly therefore stresses the importance of determining and respecting the "carrying capacity" of individual islands as a basis for any balanced approach to lasting tourism development. Moreover, it views the diversification of tourism as another imperative in order to allow a better distribution of visitor flows across seasons and sites.
6. Fishing activities have great importance for island economies, notably in ensuring sustainable livelihoods and food security. The Assembly reiterates its earlier concerns about overfishing leading to reduced stocks, as expressed in its [Recommendation 1558 \(2002\)](#) on fisheries in Europe's semi-land-locked seas and [Resolution 1283 \(2002\)](#) on the preservation and management of fish stocks. In view of the steadily increasing demand for fish, the Assembly asks Council of Europe member states and in particular their island regions to further develop aquaculture along the lines of its [Resolution 1208 \(1999\)](#) on challenges, advantages and development of extensive aquaculture.

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1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee acting on behalf of the Assembly on 6 June 2005 (see [Doc. 10465](#), report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur : Mr Hunault).



7. Investment needs in Europe's islands are, for the above-mentioned reasons, often greater than on the mainland. The Assembly in this context believes that certain areas of activity require particular attention by policy makers and investors in order to consolidate island development and improve the quality of life in island societies. They include :

*diversification of employment opportunities through the development of the services sector (notably as regards quality tourism, for instance cultural and eco-tourism, as well as tele-learning and tele-working) ;*

*special support for the creation and growth of small and medium-sized enterprises by increasing their access to micro-credit facilities and business advisory services ;*

*establishing, or strengthening as the case may be, integrated territorial planning strategies that promote respect for core environmental protection principles in all economic activities and urban planning. This is in consideration of the environmental uniqueness of many islands, forming as it does a central element of their identity and a key competitive advantage ;*

*the development of innovative systems for water, energy and waste management, via pilot projects and increased recourse to renewable energy sources and waste recycling ;*

*improving transport links to the mainland and between islands (including enhanced safety and "multimodal" means of transport), modernisation of ports and greater emphasis on public transport in islands ;*

*the use of special support measures, including in taxation, in order to stimulate investment and island settlement ;*

*more extensive use of EU structural and cohesion funds to enhance investment in infrastructure.*

8. At a time when the enlarged European Union is undertaking a revision of the size of, and attribution criteria for, its structural and cohesion funds, the Assembly invites the European Union to consider the possibility of shaping an integrated European Community policy for island regions and of setting up a special financing facility or fund to boost investment in island regions for the priority areas listed above, so as to offset their competitive disadvantages and improve their prospects for more harmonious development. The Assembly also calls on Council of Europe member states with island regions to support the proposals contained in this resolution's paragraphs 5 to 8 and to draft national action plans for their implementation.