

25 September 2015**Bundesrat
Resolution**

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerning a European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region**COM(2015) 366 final**

At its 936th session on 25 September 2015, the *Bundesrat* adopted the following opinion pursuant to § 3 and § 5 of the Act on Cooperation between the Federation and the *Länder* in European Union Affairs (EUZBLG):

1. The *Bundesrat* welcomes the Commission's proposal for an EU Strategy for the Alpine Region, which encompasses around 80 million people in 48 regions and seven States. It provides the framework for further strengthening cooperation with the aim of improving economic development, transport connectivity, environmental conditions and the sustainability of energy systems.
2. It also welcomes the fact that the Commission has drawn up the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region in close cooperation with, and on the basis of extensive consultation of, stakeholders and inhabitants in the region concerned.
3. The *Bundesrat* further welcomes the integrated approach of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region, bringing together policy areas which are usually dealt with separately and thus aiming at coordinated cooperation between the Commission and the regions, participating States, organisations and other stakeholders. Substantial synergies can be achieved thereby. It supports the chosen approach of a macro-regional strategy, as has already been implemented successfully in the context of the Strategies for the Baltic Region, Danube Region and Adriatic-Ionian Region.
4. In addition, the *Bundesrat* welcomes the fact that the Commission has focused on key priority areas which are to be targeted under the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region: boosting prosperity, the connectivity of the Alpine Region, and environmental protection and increased energy sustainability. The Strategy can thus provide a dynamic framework for further development of the Alpine Region. In the priority area of economic growth and innovation, sectors such as tourism, farming and forestry and their downstream sectors, energy, the research environment and also education and training, especially in rural areas, are to be strengthened in order to improve job opportunities. In the priority area of transport, the combination of different types of passenger and freight transport is to be promoted. With regard to communication, the focus is on digital networking for people and on improving the

accessibility of public services. The third priority area concerns environmental protection and thus issues such as preserving resources, ecological connectivity, risk management and climate change. In addition, the Alpine Region should become a model region for energy efficiency and renewable energy.

5. Reflecting the challenges which have been identified with regard to developing sustainable mobility in the Alpine Region, the Strategy focuses on promoting intermodal mobility solutions and connectivity across the whole Alpine Region, especially by ensuring the connectivity of rural areas and remote regions. This is intended to combat the negative environmental impact of traffic and depopulation and secure the economic survival of those regions.

The *Bundesrat* welcomes this focus. At the same time, it realises that the connectivity of rural areas and remote regions poses particular difficulties, precisely with regard to the development of environmentally sustainable mobility solutions in the Alpine Region, but also in other European regions. It therefore suggests that particular attention be paid, when the Strategy and its accompanying action plan are implemented, to the development of strategies and pilot projects for sustainable mobility in rural areas. As lighthouse projects these can simultaneously provide important ideas for other European regions, such as the Danube Region, which face similar problems.

6. The *Bundesrat* supports the Commission's approach that coordination of the individual priority areas should be a matter for the States and regions. In particular, responsibility for implementing the projects and for their success is primarily a matter for local stakeholders. In this respect, Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria will assume a major role in implementing the Strategy in Germany.
7. The *Bundesrat* welcomes the macro-regional strategies' approach keeping the creation of new governance structures to an absolute minimum. With limited staff resources this is necessary, in particular, to maintain the policy-making capacity and administrative efficiency of the countries involved. It therefore supports close cooperation between the EU Alpine Region Strategy and existing national, regional, local and cross-border bodies.
8. The *Bundesrat* thus agrees with the Commission that streamlined governance mechanisms are vital for the effective implementation of macro-regional strategies, and notes its recommendation for two-tiered coordination where policy management is concerned. It advocates that the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region be implemented through the efficient use of staff resources with due regard, at the same time, for the complexity of the macro-regional strategy. It therefore recommends that the action group leaders also cover the functions of the planned objective coordinators, as far as possible.
9. The *Bundesrat* also welcomes the fact that the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region is intended to make a major contribution towards the implementation of other important EU policies and objectives, including the Europe 2020 strategy, and to support improvements in the implementation of EU legislation, especially in connection with the single market and the environment. It can provide a framework for improving the coordination of existing EU political initiatives and instruments, such as transport and energy policy, cohesion policy or the EU strategy on preserving biodiversity, and for using them to optimum effect.

10. The added value of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region can be found in the enhancement of cross-border and cross-regional cooperation. For this reason the Structural Funds and the relevant programmes under the cohesion policy are an important instrument. The *Bundesrat* welcomes the fact that the Alpine Space programme constitutes a separate Interreg V B programme for trans-national cooperation.
11. It agrees with the Commission that the Strategy should offer an overall framework for the Alpine Region. It is precisely the combination of existing initiatives and organisations, such as the Alpine Convention and the Alpine Space programme, which can generate added value.
12. The *Bundesrat* regrets the fact that Commission has tabled the accompanying action plan on the Alpine Region Strategy only in English. The action plan sets out the planned actions in detail. The *Bundesrat* calls on the Commission to translate the action plan into at least the official languages of the seven States involved, in the interest of meaningful participation by civil society and public information on the ground.
13. The *Bundesrat* is sending this opinion directly to the Commission.