(English version)

Question for written answer E-001880/24
to the Commission
Sakis Arnaoutoglou (S&D)
(30 September 2024)

Subject: Supporting small Greek islands through EU funds and improving technical support structures

Greece's small islands, along with the EU's other small islands, face specific challenges such as geographical isolation, limited infrastructure and services, demographic pressure and the effects of climate change. At the same time, however, these challenges also present unique opportunities for growth through the exploitation of the islands' natural and cultural heritage. Despite all efforts, small islands often lack the technical support they need to make the most of European funds and this has a negative impact on their growth and economic stability.

In view of the above and bearing in mind the need for small islands to develop sustainably by 2040, can the Commission answer the following:

1. Given the lack of sufficient technical support structures on small islands, what structures or mechanisms does the Commission intend to develop or propose to help these areas strengthen their ability to claim and absorb EU funds?

2. In what ways can the EU boost programmes and investments aimed at the sustainable development of small islands, ensuring that infrastructure, transport and digital connectivity are upgraded with a view to improving the living conditions and economic prospects of the islands' inhabitants?

Submitted: 30.9.2024

Answer given by Executive Vice-President Fitto on behalf of the European Commission
(20 December 2024)

1. The Commission supports Member States in strengthening administrative capacity for Cohesion Policy through knowledge development (studies, pilot projects) and dissemination (workshops, training, toolkits, networking, peer exchanges). In 2024, a Network of Heads of Managing Authorities was launched to foster knowledge-sharing and inspire leadership in implementing cohesion policies.

For Greece, addressing weaknesses in local authorities and targeted beneficiaries is a priority under the 2021-2027 Partnership Agreement. Therefore, with the support of the Cohesion Policy Funds ([1]), some EUR 100 million ([2]) have been allocated under the "Technical Assistance and Beneficiary Support Programme" ([3]) supplemented by additional technical assistance funds under regional and sectoral programmes.

2. The Regional Programmes promote the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories, including those of small islands, fostering territorial cohesion, diversifying economic activities, creating quality jobs, improving skills, and enhancing infrastructure and services.

Moreover, based on a coherent strategic plan covering certain areas ([4]), the GR-eco Islands initiative ([5]), co-financed with EUR 157 ([6]) million, will apply to a limited number of small islands ([7]) and promote the transition to energy neutrality and sustainable economic activity, including tourism.

The Greek Recovery and Resilience Plan, along with the Cohesion policy, includes investments to support the islands like the electricity interconnection of the islands with the mainland electricity system and upgrades to island port infrastructure, and reforms like the legal framework for the transition to Gigabit broadband connectivity via submarine cables.

([1]) Specifically, under the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund+.
([2]) Public expenditure.
([3]) http://www.tye.gr/en/Pages/default_old.aspx
([4]) Areas such as energy, environment, circular economy, transport, tourism, culture and agri-food.
([5]) https://peka-program.gr/protovoulia-gr-eco-islands/
([6]) The initiative is co-financed with EUR 100 million under the 2021-2027 'Environment and Climate Change Programme' and EUR 57 million under the "Just Transition Development Programme".
([7]) Islands of the South and North Aegean and the Ionian islands.