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## R E P O R T

of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and  
Consumer Protection

on the danger to natural and semi-natural habitat in the  
Alps (EC and EFTA countries) posed by the steady increase in  
summer and winter tourism in these areas

Rapporteur: Mr Karl PARTSCH

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A Series: Reports - B Series: Motions for Resolutions, Oral Questions - C Series: Documents received from other Institutions (e.g. Consultations)

**\*** = Consultation procedure requiring a single reading

**\*\*II** = Cooperation procedure (second reading) which requires the votes of a majority of the current Members of Parliament for rejection or amendment

**\*\*I** = Cooperation procedure (first reading)

**\*\*\*** = Parliamentary assent which requires the votes of a majority of the current Members of Parliament

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At the sitting of 25 January 1991 the President of Parliament announced that he had forwarded the motion for a resolution by Mr Simeoni on the damage caused to natural and semi-natural habitats by land and property speculation in connection with large-scale tourist projects, pursuant to Rule 63 of the Rules of Procedure, to the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection as the committee responsible.

At its meeting of 26 February 1991 the committee decided to draw up a report and appointed Mr Partsch rapporteur. At the same meeting the committee decided to include Petition No. 0380/88 by Mr Eugen Bohl (subject: Water balance; committee responsible: Petitions) within the scope of its report.

At its meeting of 26 February 1991 the committee considered the draft report and adopted the motion for a resolution unanimously.

The following took part in the vote: Collins, chairman; Schleicher, vice-chairman; Scott-Hopkins, vice-chairman; Partsch, rapporteur; Amendola, de la Camara Martinez, Diez de Rivera Icaza, Hadjigeorgiou (for Alber), Caroline Jackson, Jensen, Klaus-Peter Köhler, Kuhn, Monnier-Besombes, Valverde Lopez, Vernier and Vittinghoff.

The report was tabled on 4 April 1991.

The deadline for tabling amendments will appear in the draft agenda for the part-session at which the report is to be considered.

A  
MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

on the danger to the natural and semi-natural habitats in the Alps (EC and EFTA countries) posed by the steady increase in summer and winter tourism in these areas

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the motion for a resolution by Mr Simeoni on the damage caused to natural and semi-natural habitats by land and property speculation in connection with large-scale tourist projects (B3-1989/90),
  - having regard to petition No. 0380/88 by Mr Eugen Bohl,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection (A3-0084/91),
1. Demands that the present disastrous, cut-throat competition in tourism be curbed to match the development potential of the Alpine region as a whole, in accordance with the fourth objective of the Decision<sup>1</sup> on the European Tourism Year and the repeated demands of the European Parliament; all forms of exploitation of the Alps for the purposes of tourism must, in accordance with the 'polluter pays' principle, cover the associated external environmental costs;
  2. Calls, for a European information network to be set up to make coordinated planning in the Alps possible, with data on the environment, the development of tourism and infrastructure, one of the objectives being to acquire more information on forms of 'soft tourism';
  3. Calls for an environmental impact assessment (EIA) to be carried out before any new development; the EIA must be an international standard and incorporated in the legal systems of all the Alpine countries; if such projects in the Alps prove to be environmentally damaging no Community finance may be granted from the ERDF or other Community funds;
  4. Takes the view that the indiscriminate spread of settlements, often into designated risk areas, must stop;
  5. Stresses that non-development zones must be designated for the Alps as a whole;
  6. Believes that immissions of harmful substances polluting the air in the Alps has brought about a destructive process causing vegetation to die; all resources must be deployed immediately to achieve a massive reduction in harmful substances in the air, both in Europe and worldwide;

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<sup>1</sup> '- promote a better distribution of tourism over time and location while respecting the quality of the environment, particularly by encouraging the staggering of holidays and the development of alternatives to mass tourism, and of new destinations and new forms of tourism' (Council Decision of 21 December 1988 declaring 1990 European Tourism Year)

7. Recommends that, in order to reduce the enormous level of pollution by road vehicles, all possible combinations of public and private transport should be exploited and rail transport, in particular, should be promoted;
8. Stresses that, given the declining game population in the mountain woodlands, indigenous tree and bush varieties need to be planted in unfenced areas; this will enhance the protective function of woodlands in the Alps (subsidies for forests should be staggered to reflect the degree of protection provided);
9. Considers it advisable, if forests are cut down in development schemes, to reinstate a tree-line immediately to provide protection from the wind and sun;
10. Takes the view that indigenous species of pioneer plants must be used in the replanting of areas at risk from erosion or other causes;
11. Calls for mountain farmers to be given a compensation payment per hectare to enable them to engage in the protection and further development of the countryside, and calls for the extensive cultivation of the countryside to be guaranteed; farmers must be given compensation by ski-lift firms for the resulting loss in earnings, in accordance with the 'polluter pays' principle;
12. Believes that major sporting events should only be hosted by towns and villages which already have the appropriate facilities;
13. Demands that, in order to preserve the drinking water reserves of Central Europe, no further glacier development plans should be permitted (36 glaciers have already been developed as summer ski areas); at existing ski centres waste-water disposal must be made subject to certain legal requirements, e.g. waste-disposal pipelines connected to treatment plants in the valleys;
14. Calls for heavy excavators and bulldozers to be banned from the Alpine uplands, all large-scale levelling operations to be stopped and the blasting of rock for ski-runsto be discontinued;
15. Stresses that, under an EIA-approved development scheme, the indigenous vegetation must be carefully removed and stored and replanted in its original position after the ground has been landscaped with light walking excavators;
16. Insists that, following an EIA, artificial snow should be created using water of drinking-water quality without chemical or bacterial additives and that artificial snow must not be used to prolong the season;
17. Insists that skiing and use of piste-maintenance equipment must cease immediately the compacted snow cover is less than 20 cm (measured at 10 points);
18. Believes that, following the Austrian example, off-piste skiing should be banned;

19. Takes the view that touring skiers should be provided with appropriate guidance in the form of routes to follow and recommendations in respect of nature conservation areas;
20. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council and the governments and parliaments of the EC and EFTA countries.

B  
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

I. Remarks

1. The Alps occupy a special position as an ecologically high-risk area in the heart of Europe. As a source of top-quality drinking water, as a recreational and transit area with hydroelectric resources and, not least, as the home of 12 million people and rare species of flora and fauna, the Alps are unique.
2. Tourism of the future must therefore be acceptable from the point of view of the environment, regional planning, society and culture.
3. Some hundred million people (40 million long-stay and 60 million week-end tourists with a total of more than 500 million guest-nights) visit the Alps every year. Tourism worldwide, with an annual turnover of \$209 billion, is an economic factor of prime importance. The Alps alone account for 25% of annual turnover worldwide (about \$52 billion).
4. 70% of the 12 million people living in the Alps depend directly or indirectly on tourism for their livelihood. However, the problem of the environment is one facing a group of seven countries with different standards of living, states of development and attitudes, i.e. perceptions of the problems of the environment.
5. A survey carried out by the 'Studienkreis für Tourismus' (tourism study group) in Germany has shown that the number of holidaymakers recalling ecological problems at the place where they spent their holidays has risen from just on 30% (1985) to 57.6% (1989). This is evidence both of increased damage to the environment and of greater awareness on the part of holidaymakers. The main forms of damage to be seen in the Alps are erosion and dead trees.
6. Austria, Switzerland and the Federal Republic of Germany have drawn up danger maps for the Alpine valleys marking areas threatened by avalanches, landslides or flooding. In these 'red' or 'yellow' zones construction is banned or only permitted under certain conditions. Nonetheless, settlements are continuing to spread; the growing number of second homes poses a serious problem (e.g. Balderschwang in the Allgäu in the FRG, where the ratio of indigenous living space to second homes is approximately 1:2). The high number of second homes places a severe strain on the local authorities which have to meet the infrastructure costs. For this reason second homes should not account for more than 5% of all building in a local authority area. Land and property speculation in the Alpine region has reached such a scale that the price of building land ranges from DM 500 to DM 9000/m<sup>2</sup>. This development is causing an exodus of the young indigenous population who can no longer afford these prices. The original community is gradually disappearing.
7. Tourism has a harmful effect on the environment because it puts a strain on the countryside, but it also provides a livelihood - often the only source of income. However, economy and ecology should complement each other in the Alps. Only a sound economy can finance the very costly measures to restore the environment (see the report by Mrs Carmen Diez de Rivera Icaza, A3-0120/90). Destruction of the environment, in particular

through the continuing disappearance not only of mountain forests but also of the green belt as such, without whose protection from erosion, avalanches and flooding, life in the Alps is impossible, threatens to remove the basis for a sound economy.

8. The basis of Alpine tourism is the countryside. Two thirds of the surface area of the Alps form an area which has been cultivated by man for centuries and has been given its identity by its human and animal population. In order to preserve this cultivated landscape, it must be given appropriate subsidies (compensation payments per hectare) to promote its continued extensive cultivation. Without subsidies, extensive cultivation, which is very labour intensive (steep mountain pastures have to be mown by hand), cannot be guaranteed in future. In order to remain viable, unsuitable areas are at present farmed intensively using commercial fertilizers and herbicides. This results on the one hand in the loss of the diversity and therefore the attractiveness of the landscape, and on the other hand in the pollution of the water table by nitrates and sulphates and herbicide residues.
9. The greatest damage is caused by development using heavy machinery. Depending on the geological formation, the soil is so compacted that often only 5-15% of precipitation can be absorbed. Bulldozing large areas is almost tantamount to sealing them since it adversely affects their capillary capacity. The result is erosion where the land has been bulldozed. Upkeep in winter also results in compacting of the snow on the run which reduces its insulation properties and causes frost to a depth of more than 1 m. The delayed thaw can reduce the vegetation period by as much as four weeks (artificial snow has the same effect). If the snow is not deep enough, the weight and razor-sharp tracking used on ski-run maintenance equipment can cut furrows in the vegetation and the soil. Steel-edged skis of numerous skiers also harm the vegetation. In extreme cases the humus rich A-horizon of the soil profile may be removed in its entirety.
10. Another serious problem is posed by off-piste and touring skiers coming downhill away from the ski runs in light woodland since they can remove saplings. Repeated disturbance is a threat to the survival of rare varieties of fauna (e.g. grouse).
11. It would be wrong, however, to regard skiers as solely responsible for the damage in the Alpine region. Large-scale summer tourism causes mountain paths, originally 60 cm wide to be extended into tracks up to 30 m wide. Short cuts (usually used to cut corners downhill) develop into erosion rills stripped of vegetation which are rapidly deepened and widened by the surface water flowing into them. The only effective measures appear at present to be to fence in tourists within a width of 2.5 metres.
12. Damage is often caused either by ignorance or carelessness. Comprehensive information campaigns by local groups (Alpine clubs, mountaineering clubs, tourist institutions, etc.) and notices on the spot providing instructions, should foster public awareness of each individual's responsibility for helping to preserve the Alps through appropriate behaviour. Only an integrated approach can solve the problems. Winter tourism in the Alps needs to be looked at in its

entirety, but it must be made quite clear that long-term declarations of intent will not save the Alps!

## II. Basic principles

1. The economy, the environment and culture are closely interrelated.
2. An effective environmental policy is not possible without the active involvement of the economic, social and cultural aspects.
3. Without the economy, life ceases to be viable, and without a social and cultural identity there can be no responsibility for the environment.
4. A European environmental agency with inspection and supervisory powers is needed to implement these requirements.
5. The sensitive ecosystem of the Alps is so much at risk that the situation is already critical. Only the immediate implementation of the measures that are needed can save the situation.

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION (B3-1989/90) by Mr SIMEONI pursuant to Rule 63 of the Rules of Procedure on the damage caused to natural and semi-natural habitats by land and property speculation in connection with large-scale tourist projects

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The European Parliament,

- A. having regard to the proliferation of large-scale tourist projects in the Community (marinas, theme parks, thalassotherapy centres, golf courses, etc.), especially in peripheral areas experiencing external economic pressures,
- B. whereas most of these projects involve a property element, often disguised, which enables the developers and concessionaires to make large profits within a short time,
- C. whereas most of these projects cause serious and often irreversible damage to sites of outstanding natural beauty which belong to humanity as a whole and to future generations,
- D. whereas the content, the financing and implementation of these projects are in effect often outside the control of the local and regional populations directly concerned,
- E. whereas in some Member States real estate transactions in connection with large-scale tourist projects infringe the laws on the protection of natural and semi-natural habitats (e.g. French legislation on coastal areas),
  - 1. Expresses its concern at the growing impact on natural and semi-natural habitats in the Community of the development of land and property speculation in connection with large-scale tourist projects;
  - 2. Calls on the Member States to pass the necessary legislation or to ensure that existing legislation is strictly implemented;
  - 3. Calls on the Commission to consider the possible harmonization of laws in the Member States and whether it would be appropriate to draw up a draft directive on the subject.