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Dear Members of the Atlantic Arc Commission,

One year ago, I was honoured to welcome you in the city of Donostia-San Sebastián for the Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly 2022. After years of unforeseen remote cooperation, I highly valued this chance to meet you in person to debate and celebrate our cooperation. Once again, we successfully expressed our key messages in our annual Political Declaration and in the Pledge in favour of a Clean Atlantic Ocean, demonstrating the vital role of our territories in connecting Atlantic communities and tackling common challenges together.

On this occasion, the Basque Country Government was elected as Presidency of the Atlantic Arc Commission for a second mandate. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks for the trust you placed in our Government and reaffirm my utmost commitment to support the achievement of our priorities and ambitions for the Atlantic area.

Coming to the end of the first year of our current mandate, this half-way point allows a time for assessment of our actions. Together this year, we confirmed the bold, forward-thinking, and proactive vision of the Atlantic territories to design funding and governance opportunities to respond to common challenges. In order to continue our long-lasting cooperation with the Atlantic non-EU regions, we conceptualised a transatlantic pilot project supported by the European Parliament. With one voice, we defended a series of amendments to improve the governance of the Atlantic Strategy for greater involvement of regions. From a series of bilateral exchanges to the organisation of our political seminar, we advanced on our proposal for an Atlantic Macro-Region. Identifying a gap between targets and resources, we reached out to the European Commission on Marine Renewable Energies, which eventually resulted in an increase of Horizon Europe funding.

Europe’s centre of gravity is shifting eastwards, to the detriment of the countries on the Atlantic façade. It is a crucial moment for the promotion of the Atlantic axis. We run the risk of being relegated in strategic matters and losing our capacity to influence. This has to do, not only with maritime issues, but also with connectivity, whether related to multimodal transport, energy or digitalization and the Atlantic territories’ ability to respond to the challenges posed by climate change or boost innovation with the support of smart specializations.

From a series of bilateral exchanges to the organization of our political seminar, we have advanced in our proposal for an Atlantic Macro-region.

We are now entering a turning point for Atlantic cooperation. At the dawn of the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council, it will now be the time to turn our pioneering proposals into institutionalised reality. At this pivotal time for the Atlantic, I send my warmest thanks to all Atlantic Arc Commission members for their dedication to shaping stronger, more representative cooperation across our area. I wish the Welsh Government great success in hosting the Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly of Cardiff 2023, which will be of high-symbolic value and strategic importance to celebrate the Atlantic territorial unity and pave the way forward.

I wish you a pleasant reading,

Iñigo Urkullu,
President of the Atlantic Arc Commission and President of the Basque Government
MEMBER REGIONS

Associated partners:
Atlantic Cities,
RTA-ATN,
AC3A
ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

of the Atlantic Arc Commission

President
Iñigo Urkullu

1st Vice-President
Maria Teresa Mourão de Almeida

General Assembly

Steering Group

Executive Secretariat

Atlantic Strategy

Maritime

Attractivity

Atlantic Strategy
CCDR Lisboa e Vale do Tejo

Exploration of the Atlantic Macro-Region
Basque Country

Cooperation with non-EU Regions
Wales

Brexit Task Force
Xunta de Galicia

Innovation
Nouvelle Aquitaine

Marine Renewable Energies
Basque Country

Fisheries/Aquaculture
Pays de la Loire

Ocean Pollution
CCDR Norte

Transport
Basque Country

Tourism & Culture
Cantabria
Political priorities:
- To impulse the improvement of the Atlantic Maritime Strategy and its evolution towards an Atlantic Macro-Region
- To make the most of new EU instruments (EU Recovery Plan and new Multi-Annual Financial Framework) and EU policies linked with the Green Deal
- To enhance the political visibility of the Atlantic Arc Commission at European level and increase interregional partnerships, notably with the other CPMR geographical commissions and other regional networks

General Successes:
- A political seminar to define a roadmap for the Atlantic Macro-Region
- Inclusion of Atlantic Macro-Region in the agenda of the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council
- Influence on the revision of the terms of references of the Atlantic Strategy with more regional representation
- Development of a transatlantic pilot project of the European Parliament on Atlantic regions’ Green Transition

I. Advancing together towards an Atlantic Macro-Regional Strategy
Fruitful meetings peaking with a high-level political seminar on the Atlantic Macro-Region

Aiming at the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council 2023 to call for a mandate on the creation of the Atlantic Macro-region, the Atlantic Arc Commission joined their forces to decide together on the most adequate content and model to opt for.

In order to ensure a smooth collaborative process representing the views of all Atlantic member regions, it successfully reunited for strategic discussions throughout this year:
• **The Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly of San Sebastian, May 2022.** In a session dedicated to the Atlantic Macro-Region, the Atlantic regions held a debate on potential sectorial priorities, models of governance, and steps to move the proposal forward. They were backed by the Spanish and Portuguese governments representatives Isabel Ferreira, Secretary of State of the Portuguese Government, María Lledo, Secretary General for the EU from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Spanish Government, along with Eneko Goia Mayor of Donostia/San Sebastián, President of the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities who also shared their views on the benefits of the Atlantic Macro-Region.

• **The Atlantic Arc Commission Political Steering Group, September 2022.** As a follow-up of the General Assembly, the Political Steering Group reunited to assess the advancements towards national governments and deepened their thematic reflection with a concept of flagship projects for the Atlantic. The meeting also enabled direct exchanges with DG REGIO, building on the EUSALP experience.

• **Meeting of the Atlantic Arc Commission Working Group, October 2022.** The Atlantic Arc Commission auditioned representatives of EUSALP and EUSAIR macro-regions. Thanks to the collaboration of these two existing macro-regions, the Atlantic Arc Commission gained privileged information and practical advice on setting up a successful macro-region.

• **The Atlantic Arc Commission Plenary Meeting of Crete, October 2022.** As a milestone between the General Assembly of 2022 and 2023, the Atlantic Arc Commission held a debate on the advancements and preparation of a high-level seminar for 2023.
The Atlantic Arc Commission Political Seminar on the Macro-Region, Brussels, March 2023. Initiated by Brittany region, the Atlantic Arc Commission organised a high-level political seminar, bringing Atlantic political representatives around the table to decide on preferred model of governances and themes to cover within the Macro-Region. In the presence of Atlantic experts, representatives of EUSAIR and EUSBSR, DG REGIO and MEP Younous Omarjee, this seminar facilitated direct and fruitful exchanges on the core content and model which will be promoted to the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council 2023.

In addition to these Atlantic Arc Commission meetings, the AAC also participated in the CPMR High-level event on the Macro-Region and Sea-basin strategies (September 2022), represented by its Presidency, the Basque Country. On the occasion of the CPMR Political Bureau of Murcia, March 2023, the Atlantic Arc Commission Presidency was able to share with the Secretary of State for EU Affairs of Spain, Pascual Navarro, the results of the Political Seminar exploring a roadmap for the Atlantic Macro-Region. The Spanish Government reiterated its support to the initiative during its EU Council Presidency.
The Presidium of the Atlantic Arc Commission boosting the macro-regional proposal from the ground

In the framework of his mandate as President of the Atlantic Arc Commission, Inigo Urkullu invited Atlantic counterparts in the Basque Country, which discussions further reaffirmed the shared political ambition to call for an Atlantic Macro-Region. On March 13, 2023, he reunited with Alfonso Rueda, President of Galicia, Adrián Barbón, President of Asturias, and Miguel Angel Revilla, President of Cantabria for a discussion on the common challenges of the Atlantic territories. Calling together the upcoming Spanish Presidency of the EU Council, they welcomed the potential of an Atlantic macro-region to address shared challenges such as transports, hydrogen connection, ocean pollution, and the alignment of Smart Specialisation Strategies. On March 29, 2023, the President of the AAC invited Mark Drakeford, First Minister of Wales, both welcoming the timely opportunity of the Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly of Cardiff 2023 to continue the collaboration on the Atlantic Macro-Region.

On the initiative of Teresa Almeida, President of Lisboa e Vale do Tejo Region (CCDR-LVT) and vice-president of the Atlantic Arc Commission, the region performed a wide regional stakeholder consultation with universities, research centers, business associations, start-ups and SMEs to nurture the reflection on the content of the future Atlantic Macro-Region. Among challenges discussed were the food industry, health and biotechnologies, sustainable tourism, ports development, decarbonization of Atlantic sectors and preservation of ecosystems. The CCDR-LVT also commissioned an in-depth study exploring the benefit of an Atlantic Macro-Region which brings arguments to its creation.
AAC written consultation on the priorities of cooperation in the Atlantic

The AAC Secretariat also launched a written consultation at the end of 2022 to gather ideas on possible priorities for the Atlantic Macro-Region. Respondents highlighted their interests for:

1. Climate Change Adaptation
   - The development of a system to anticipate and coordinate actions with regards extreme weather events,
   - Exchanges on the redesign of urban areas,
   - The identification of new land uses and activities compatible with the climate scenarios

2. Development of Renewable Energies
   - the development of the Atlantic industrial value chain on offshore floating wind,
   - the creation of renewable projects managed from the Energy Communities

3. The Atlantic Accessibility
   - the support of Port Railway terminals and rail-road terminals,
   - the development of more motorways of the seas to contribute to modal shift

4. Atlantic Ports as Industrial hubs
   - deployment of Onshore Power Supply and Alternative fuels,
   - the increase in renewable energy production facilitated by ports,
   - the deployment of port environmental monitoring and green infrastructures,
   - advanced Digital Services,
   - the creation of innovation centres in ports

5. Building a strong Atlantic network of innovation
   - achieving a wider and integrated ecosystem of smart specialisation,
   - completing Atlantic supply chains to improve resilience
   - developing people’s skills
Application to an ESPON stakeholder targeted analysis

Early 2023, the Atlantic Arc Commission led the submission of a proposal for a stakeholder targeted analysis as part of the ESPON 2030 programme. Bringing together a consortium composed of the AAC, Basque Country Government as Presidency of the AAC Lisboa e Vale do Tejo Region as First Vice-Presidency of the AA, the Atlantic Transnational Network (RTA-ATN), les Ceser de l’Atlantique, Atlantic Cities and CES Extremadura, the proposal ultimately aimed at gaining technical expertise and provide scientific territorial knowledge on specific challenges to address in the framework of the Atlantic Macro-Region.

Although the application was not approved for this first attempt, post-evaluation exchanges showed that ESPON valued the pertinence of the application and quality of this bottom-up consortium, welcoming the clear link between the proposal and political ambitions. Encouraged by the programme, the Atlantic Arc Commission will re-apply to the next call planned for Summer 2023.

Production of technical notes to support the Atlantic macro-region development

In addition to the note on the added-value of a Macro-Region (April 2022), the Atlantic Arc Secretariat produced two complementary analyses:

- The Atlantic Arc Commission roadmap to define priorities and flagship projects for the Macro-Region (May 2022)
- Governance of Existing Macro-Regions and possible scenarios for the Atlantic (January 2023)
II. A common call for more regional representation in the governance of the Atlantic Strategy

A source of proposals for the improvement of the Atlantic Strategy's governance

Maintaining its associated status to the Atlantic Strategy, the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat participated in the three Atlantic Strategy Committees chaired by the Spanish Presidency of 2022 since last AAC General Assembly of Donostia/San Sebastian (May 2022). The Atlantic Arc Commission also strengthened its participation in the activities of the pillar's task forces, taking part now in Pillar I “Ports as gateways and hubs for the blue economy” meetings in addition to its pre-existing commitment to Pillar III “Marine renewable energy”.

The revision of the terms of references of the Atlantic Strategy Committee was at the heart of the priorities of the Spanish Presidency 2022 which aimed for a clearer governance. The Atlantic Arc Commission seized this opportunity to call for better representation of regional authorities in the Atlantic Strategy. Throughout the revision process, the Atlantic Arc Commission facilitated common submissions of amendments on behalf of all Atlantic member regions.

Calling for significant improvements with one voice, the active contribution of the Atlantic Arc Commission enabled the inclusion of several modifications for more regional representation and better governance of the Atlantic Strategy Committee.

Although requests to secure direct participation of regions have not been approved by Member States (systemic association of regions to the meetings, veto right for associated members), many of the AAC amendments have been included in the final text, among them:

- More references to regions to ensure participation of Regions in the Atlantic Strategy;
- The right for the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat to suggest observers;
- Inclusion of the Atlantic Arc Commission proposal to develop Flagship projects in coordination with European, national, regional and local stakeholders of the Atlantic;
- Request for National Hubs of the Assistance Mechanism to include a clear territorial approach to dissemination of information towards the Atlantic communities.

In light of the Atlantic regions’ competences, expertise and long-lasting connection with Atlantic stakeholders, the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat will continue to support greater involvement of regions in the functioning of the Atlantic Strategy.
Atlantic regions in the spotlights of the Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Conference 2022

On 01 December 2022, the Atlantic Strategy celebrated its annual event in Cádiz, Spain, hosted by the Spanish Government closing its year of Presidency.

Virginius Sinkevicius, EU Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, opened the ceremony with a message on the future of the Atlantic. In his address, he underlined the role of coastal regions in the resilience and sustainability of the blue economy sectors. Aligned with his words, the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission was high on the agenda with the organisation of two interactive dialogues during the event and invitation to participate in one panel:

- **Workshop on Smart Specialisation Strategy.** Co-organised with DG MARE and chaired by Teresa Almeida, President of Lisboa e Vale do Tejo Region and Vice-President of the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission, the discussion enabled a direct exchange between Atlantic regional authorities and stakeholders, national governments, Interreg Atlantic Area programme and the European Commission on the creation of the EU Blue S3 Platform. Regions proposed potential services to boost cooperation between regions on Smart Specialisation Strategies.

- **Boosting Blue SMEs: Best practices, challenges and opportunities towards Atlantic Excellence.** In collaboration with FANBEST, SAFER and ASPBAN projects and chaired by Basque Country Government, the Atlantic Arc Commission organised a panel discussion on perspectives to boost Blue SMEs in the Atlantic. Together, they exchanged with BluInvest representative to explore the potential of an EU flagship initiative which would act as a twinning tool for ports and Blue SMEs to be embedded in the existing platform.

- **Participation in the EU Mission Ocean Atlantic-Arctic Lighthouse session.** The CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission was invited by the European Commission to a panel and presented how regional authorities were contributing to the mission objectives. The Secretariat presented the Atlantic Arc Commission Pledge on Ocean pollution signed off in San Sebastian during the 2022 General Assembly.
Connecting with the Portuguese Presidency of the Atlantic Strategy 2023

The beginning of the year 2023 marked the annual change of the Atlantic Strategy Presidency, now chaired by the Portuguese Government. The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat, together with Lisboa e Vale do Tejo region, participated in the first meeting of the presidency when the annual priorities were presented. In addition to supporting effective implementation of the actions performed by the four pillars’ task forces, the Portuguese Presidency especially expressed ambitions to hold an Atlantic ministerial meeting in October to sign a Declaration on the Atlantic Strategy’s implementation and future challenges. Additionally, Portugal will boost the international dimension of the Strategy and will aim at working on funding opportunities to implement the priorities.

End of 2022, the Atlantic Arc Commission and the Portuguese Government already agreed on holding a bilateral meeting during the time of their Atlantic Strategy Presidency. The Atlantic Arc Commission will continue to explore synergies to nurture the work of the Atlantic Strategy through the perspective of the regions.
III. Cooperation with non-EU regions: a transatlantic pilot project delivering green transition locally on the two sides of the Atlantic

Chaired by the Welsh government, the Atlantic Arc Commission Task Force on Cooperation with non-EU regions worked on the design of the activities of the future transatlantic pilot project of the European Parliament. The initiative, initially conceptualized by the Atlantic Arc Commission, had been officially submitted as a pilot project of the European Parliament in 2021 thanks to the support of MEP Younous Omarjee, Chair of REGI Committee.

Through a series of study visits, capacity building at policy actions, the pilot project will soon enable Atlantic regions to be at the core of the development of transatlantic cooperation in favour of a healthy Atlantic Ocean, supporting their endeavour to promote their assets internationally.

Ultimately, the transatlantic pilot project will aim at creating a precursor of cooperation scheme at transatlantic level to foster a green recovery in Atlantic territories including outermost regions and non-EU regions.

It will sow the seeds of a bottom-up development for a transatlantic policy of the EU, based on the Green Deal and multi-level governance, aiming at enhancing EU and non-EU Regional and Local Authorities’ appropriation of the Atlantic Strategy main objectives, strengthening dynamics of strategic cooperation between players, contributing to the sustainability of the Atlantic area and increasing the maritime economy’s importance at a transatlantic level.

One the other side of the Atlantic, Québec government expressed interest in being in the Atlantic Arc Commission. The Associated members status was approved at the CPMR Political Bureau in Murcia in March 2023.

Hand-in-hand with DG REGIO, the Atlantic Arc Commission is working towards an official kick-off of the activities before the end of 2023. The total budget of the pilot project amounts €790,000 EUR for two years.
I. Making the Atlantic Area a leader on Marine Renewable Energies

In consideration of sustainable transition and energy independence needs, this past year was marked by the unprecedented interest of the European Union in the acceleration of renewable energies’ deployment notably manifested in the RePowerEU Plan. Before the European Commission’s communication, the Atlantic Arc Commission already expressed aligned messages in the political declaration of April 2022, calling for the recognition of the geopolitical and strategic importance of the Atlantic, simplification of permitting procedures, facilitation of access to funding and respect of the marine biodiversity and social acceptance, and exploration of the potential of a macro-regional framework to cooperate on Marine Renewable Energies.

In the face of a growing potential for the Atlantic, the Atlantic Arc Commission agreed on one new priority for the mandate 2022-2024 to support the development of Marine Renewable Energies in the Atlantic Area.
Contribution to the Atlantic Strategy Pillar III on Marine Renewable Energies

As a member of the Atlantic Strategy Pillar III Task Force, the Atlantic Arc Commission participated in all meetings of the group. The Atlantic Arc Commission contributed to the revision of the roadmap of activities, which enabled to include an action to consider means to promote a lighthouse project to demonstrate innovation and collaboration between countries, coastal regions, and stakeholders in the Atlantic area.

Kicking-off the FLORES project

As a member of the EU Pact for Skills on Offshore Renewable Energies, the Atlantic Arc Commission participated in the submission of the Forward Looking at the Offshore Renewable Energies (FLORES) project proposal, which was successfully evaluated by the European Commission.

This project funded by Erasmus with a budget of 700 000 EUR, kicked off in January 2023 and will last until December 2024. Gathering 15 partners from 8 countries, it will feed into the European Pact for Skills, promoting a strong and large-scale partnership to promote upskilling and reskilling of Europeans from all ages to boost Offshore Renewables. It will especially focus on the spread of skills through dedicated training offers promotion of careers in the sector, an observatory of offered-demanded skills, and the promotion of enduring partnership. Pilot actions at regional level will be developed to adapt the training materials and needs to the reality of the different Europe’s sea basins in the Atlantic, the Baltic and the Mediterranean, extending that knowledge to the rest of Europe through the large-scale partnership.

The Atlantic Arc Commission will contribute to build a community of users for the materials developed by the project in the regions with most interest in the Offshore Renewable Energy and identify barriers to the creation of durable partnerships and good practices to overcome them. In particular, the AAC will be in charge of developing a workshop to engage regions in building an Offshore Renewable Energy large scale partnership.
Monitoring Horizon Europe calls following AAC letter

Following the AAC’s call to the European Commission to dedicate more funding under Horizon Europe on ocean energies, the AAC Secretariat has been monitoring the Horizon Europe work programme 2023-2024.

In December 2022, the European Commission adopted its work programme dedicating EUR 24 million for wave energy and 20 million for demonstration of sustainable tidal energy farms as well as additional 4 million for critical technologies for the future ocean energy farms. Besides, EUR 36 million will be dedicated to offshore wind energy, supporting actions such as the development of critical technologies for the offshore wind farm of the future, digital twin for forecasting of power production to wind energy demand, increase the circularity of offshore wind energy systems optimisation of socio-economic impacts in the deployment, or demonstrations of innovative floating wind concepts.
II. Atlantic regions at the forefront of the fight against Ocean Pollution

An Atlantic Arc Commission pledge heard at UN level

Created at the Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly 2021 from the political impetus of Norte Region, the Atlantic Arc Commission Ocean Working Group has thrived to lay the first stone of its set of actions, which eventually led the Atlantic Arc Commission to be heard beyond EU frameworks of influence.

During the AAC General Assembly of May 2022 of Donostia/San Sebastian, AAC member regions framed their shared ambition to cooperate on marine pollution in the pledge in favour of a Clean Atlantic Ocean. Based on the CleanAtlantic project outcomes, this series of messages addresses the Atlantic regions’ common willingness to be at the forefront of prevention and reduction of ocean pollution.

The joint message of the Atlantic regions was rapidly heard at international levels. On the occasion of the United Nations Ocean Conference, June 2022, Lisbon, which gathered decisive actors shaping the future of the oceans worldwide, the Atlantic Arc Commission seized this opportunity to shed a light on the activities of its Ocean Pollution Working Group and promote the pledge.

In addition to an invitation of the United Nations to participate as one of the selected stakeholders in the UN Interactive Dialogue addressing marine pollution, the Atlantic Arc Commission organised an official side-event on Interregional cooperation and EU leverages to further discuss possibilities to set the ambitions of Atlantic regions into motion. In a high-level panel chaired by António M. Cunha, President of Norte Region and Chair of the Atlantic Arc Commission Ocean Pollution Working Group, former MEP Manuel Pizarro, DG MARE representative and Philippe Monbet, Coordinator of the Pillar IV of the Atlantic Strategy and Deputy Director of Pole Mer Bretagne Atlantique exchanged on initiatives, actions and EU opportunities to tackle marine pollution in the Atlantic, taking into account the legacy of the CleanAtlantic project.
Production of a regional policy toolkit on the fight against marine litter

In order to further support regions in their fight against Ocean Pollution, the Atlantic Arc Commission has worked on the production of a regional policy toolkit. This toolkit will aim at translating the CleanAtlantic project’s achievements into supporting tools to improve regional policies on marine litter and exploring existing best practice implemented in the Atlantic area. It will be used to compare experiences among regions on the fight against marine litter and support the development of actions and collaborative initiatives addressed to improve prevention, detection, monitoring, follow up and removal of marine litter at an Atlantic level.

It will be used to put in motion the AAC Pledge on Ocean Pollution and deliver the AAC contribution to Atlantic Strategy Pillar IV ‘Healthy Ocean’.

The Atlantic Arc Commission contribution to the EU Ocean Mission “Restore our Oceans and Waters”

In 2022, the European Commission officially launched the EU Ocean Mission Restore Our Oceans and Waters. With a 2030 target, the EU Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters" aims to protect and restore the health of our ocean and waters through research and innovation, citizen engagement and blue investments. Encouraging a holistic approach, the Mission supports regional engagement and cooperation through sea-basin “lighthouses”. The Atlantic-Artic lighthouse is aimed to respond to the specific objective of preserving and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems and biodiversity for increased climate resilience.

To promote the work of the AAC Ocean Pollution Working Group at EU level, CCDR-Norte adhered to the Ocean Mission Charter launched by the European Commission and registered the Pledge on Ocean Pollution as a relevant action aligned with the objective of the Mission.

Besides, in order to support the practical implementation of the Mission objectives, the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat kicked-off its involvement in two projects:

- BlueMissionAA
- Prep4Blue
• BlueMissionAA. Standing as the Lighthouse project for the Atlantic and Arctic Sea basins, the project supports the building and animation of a coordination hub to support the mission implementation in the two areas. With a budget of 50,000 EUR, the Atlantic Arc Commission is especially involved to assess the alignment of Smart Specialisation Strategies with the Mission objectives. Together with partners, it will develop recommendations for the regions on investment priorities on restoration of ecosystems, future market opportunities, effective use of research infrastructure, support systems tailored to their objectives and relevant emerging technologies. Two workshops with Atlantic and Arctic regions will be organised in this framework.

• Prep4Blue. In order to support the R&I goals of the Mission and facilitate its successful implementation, the project oversees and supports the sea-basin lighthouses through the development of tools, guidelines and methodologies to be used by stakeholders on all Mission funded projects. The CPMR is leading the creation of pilot stakeholder assemblies for the Mission and also runs an analysis of S3s related to the Mission Objectives across the different sea-basins. It will nurture the work performed by the AAC under BlueMissionAA.

III. Blue Innovation: Exploring Atlantic synergies through Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies

Exploring synergies and cooperation between Atlantic Blue S3s

As Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies for 2021-2027 were progressively released, the Atlantic Arc Commission kept monitoring their content through an ongoing update of the analysis “Atlantic Smart Specialisation Strategies: Commonalities, differences and the way forward to boost cooperation”. This document provides a comparative analysis of Atlantic RIS3s between current and previous programming period, and overview of the Blue dimension of Atlantic S3s. It allows practical exploration of synergies and emerging trends between Atlantic RIS3s, ultimately aiming to boost Blue S3s cooperation between regions.
In order to nurture the content of the analysis and discuss its conclusions on the way forward with regions, the Atlantic Arc Commission participated in two events in collaboration with FANBEST project and Galicia region:

- **Supporting the Atlantic Blue Economy, Santiago de Compostela, June 2022.** The event was hosted by the General Technical Secretary of the Department of the Sea of Galicia Region who presented the regional mapping on funding schemes supporting blue sectors and the Galician strategy for the Blue Economy.

- **Contribution to the transnational cooperation projects to the smart specialisation strategies in the Atlantic Area, online, March 2023.** This event facilitated an exchange between Galicia region on the elaboration and implementation of their S3 2021-2027 and the FANBEST recommendations and outcomes.

**Close collaboration with the European Commission’s Blue S3 Platform**

This year, the CPMR continued providing support and expertise to DG MARE in the launch of the Blue S3. On the occasion of the CPMR General Assembly 2022, Crete, the one-day event “Smart Specialisation for Sustainable Blue Economy” was co-organised with DG MARE to offer a place for regions to express their interest for potential innovative value chains, discover the S3 Blue platform, and progress on the creation of synergies with cooperative frameworks such as sea basins and macroregional strategies and networks through S3. The Atlantic Arc Commission participated in the discussions and was especially represented by Basque Country government as host of the session on Marine Renewable Energies.

As a follow-up, the Atlantic Arc Commission co-organised a workshop at the Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Conference 2022 (December 2022, Cadiz) together with DG MARE.
and FANBEST project in order to specifically tackle challenges and paths for more cooperation on Atlantic S3s. Chaired by Teresa Almeida, President of Lisboa e Vale do Tejo Region and Vice-President of the Atlantic Arc Commission, participants addressed potential services in the Blue S3 Platform and made further proposals to strengthen S3 cooperation in the Atlantic.

IV. Towards a sustainable and innovative Atlantic fisheries and aquaculture sector

Atlantic regions at the European Parliament to call for a better governance of the Common Fisheries Policy

As part of the CPMR Maritime Affairs actions, member regions kept working together towards more regional engagement in the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

Early 2023, on the initiative of the CPMR and hosted by Chair of the Fisheries Committee MEP Pierre Karleskind, CPMR regional representatives gathered for an exchange of views on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) with members of the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament. Claire Hugues, Vice-President of Pays de la Loire Region and Chair of the CPMR Fisheries Working Group, pointed out the importance of reviewing the governance of the CFP as well as the involvement of regions considering their competences not only in fisheries but also in sectors such as research and innovation.

Atlantic representation was also ensured by the participation of Daniel Cueff, Vice-President for Maritime and Coastal Affairs of Brittany, Rosa Quintana, Regional Minister of the Sea from Xunta de Galicia, John O’Fearraigh, Regional Councillor in Donegal County Council and José Manuel Martinez, Director General for Fisheries and Aquaculture for Andalucia.
Production of a regional toolkit to support the Atlantic seafood sector

The Atlantic Arc Commission produced a toolkit to support the transfer of results from SAFER project to Atlantic regional policy makers interested in the sustainable transition of the Atlantic seafood sector. The policy toolkit provides an overview of Atlantic regions’ best practice, insights on the consideration of the sector in Atlantic Smart Specialisation Strategies, and a set of recommendations based on the SAFER project experience. Read it here.

Bringing together Atlantic actors on a project proposal for Aquaculture skills

Encouraged by the political impetus of Nouvelle Aquitaine Region and with the support of Brittany and Pays de la Loire regions, the Atlantic Arc Commission was at the source of the project proposal AQUARIUM (Atlantic Aquaculture Curriculum for Vocational Education and Training) submitted under the Erasmus+ Programme Call Partnership for Excellence - Centres of Vocational Excellence 2022. The Atlantic Arc Commission managed to bring together 13 Atlantic partners and 1 Mediterranean partner to create a new generation of skills adapted to the transformation of the Atlantic aquaculture sector.

Although this first attempt for submission was not approved for this call, the Atlantic Arc Commission welcomed this insightful exercise to bring together Atlantic actors to co-design solutions for the future generation of Atlantic workforce and to reflect on means to safeguard a traditional and high-potential socio-economic sector for the Atlantic communities.

In consideration of this shared interest to cooperate on this meaningful challenge for the Atlantic, the Atlantic Arc Commission will explore future opportunities to valorise this partnership and set the proposal into motion.
TRANSPORTS / ATTRACTIVITY

Thriving for a sustainable transport and complete connectivity for the Atlantic

Political priorities:
- To make the most of new EU instruments (EU Recovery Plan and new Multi-Annual Financial Framework) and EU policies linked with the Green Deal
- To enhance the political visibility of the Atlantic Arc Commission at European level and increase interregional partnerships, notably with the other CPMR geographical commissions and other regional networks

General Successes:
- Key additions of Atlantic transport sections in TEN-T maps to improve accessibility of the Atlantic area
- Policy recommendations to boost Atlantic ports as hubs of the Blue Economy
- High interactions with other CPMR Geographical Commissions on the transfer of the ASPBAN model
- Meeting with Charlina Vitcheva, Director General of DG MARE on the support to ports transition as hub of the blue economy

I. Voicing Atlantic needs for a satisfactory TEN-T regulation

Boosting Atlantic accessibility in TEN-T regulation negotiations

Since 2019, the CPMR and the AAC developed a lobbying strategy to support its members with regards the TEN-T regulation revision. The strategy kick started with an AAC high level political event with Carlo Secchi, coordinator of the Atlantic Corridor and MEP Izaskun Bilbao, member of TRAN, in September 2019 in the Port of Bilbao. Throughout 2019-2022, the CPMR and the AAC gathered inputs of its members on improvements to bring to TEN-T regulations and maps of the Core and Comprehensive networks.

The AAC members participated in the CPMR activities to promote our positions on the revision. Thanks to this early commitment, the Commission proposal of 14 December 2021 already expressed more ambition for the Atlantic Corridor, with notable additional sections:
- Brest port is included in the core network connected with maritime links to the Irish ports, with a connexion to Nantes-St-Nazaire included in the “extended core network” with a completion deadline of 2040 (Commission’s proposal)
The rail connexion for passengers between Porto and Vigo is included in the “extended core network” with a completion deadline of 2040 (Commission’s proposal).

The rail connexion for freight between La Rochelle-Poitier, La Rochelle-Bordeaux developing the hinterland of La Rochelle Port and between Sines and Evora are included in the “extended core network” (Commission’s proposal).

During 2022-2023, the CPMR met with MEPs and representatives of the EU presidencies also contributed to bring to the attention of EU legislators the AAC messages. CPMR submitted 44 amendments on the Regulation to the European Parliament and the Council in 2022. The General Approach of the Council already included AAC amendments such as the addition of the Port of Galway in the comprehensive network.

The report of the TRAN Committee adopted on 13 April 2023 incorporate many more. For what concern the Atlantic Area, additional sections were approved by the European Parliament such as:

- The Bilbao (ES) Santander (ES) high speed for rail freight and passenger added to the core network and to the Atlantic Corridor.
- The ports of Santander (ES), Ferrol (ES) and Vigo (ES) upgraded as core network ports.
- The Vigo (ES) Porto (PT) passenger rail section (≥ 200 km/h) added to the core network.

Trialogues are expected to stumble on a series of points such as the governance of the TEN-T and the technical and operational requirements. However, EU Institutions should aim at reaching a deal before the next European Parliament elections in May 2024. The CPMR and AAC will continue to monitor the negotiations in 2023.
II. Tapping in the potential of Atlantic ports as hubs of the Blue Economy

Boosting Atlantic ports and Blue SMEs with the AspBAN project

Running its second year of implementation, the AspBAN project provided a valuable network of Atlantic stakeholders and practical resources to support Atlantic ports in the diversification of their activities. This year, this theme raised growing interest and was particularly present during CPMR General Assembly of Crete 2022.

During its plenary meeting of October 2022 in Crete, the Atlantic Arc Commission approved a set of policy recommendations addressed to the European Institutions, national governments and stakeholders of the Blue Economy to shape new generation of blue policies and instruments. Among the key messages, the regions called for the European Commission to consider a flagship initiative at EU level based on the AspBAN experience, which would act as an incubator and capacity building instruments between ports and blue enterprises. Within the same day, an Atlantic delegation supported by Basque Country government and Mathieu Bergé, Regional Councilor for Nouvelle-Aquitaine, met with Charlina Vitcheva, Director General of DG MARE, to present the main messages of the Atlantic Arc Commission to pave the way for the future of Atlantic Ports.

As part of the CPMR Blue Acceleration Platform approved during the Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly 2021, the Atlantic Arc Commission continued its work of transferability of the AspBAN model to other sea-basins. In September 2022, the Atlantic Arc Commission co-organised the workshop “Tapping in the potential of Balkan and Black Sea ports for the future of blue economy” in Poti, Georgia with the CPMR Balkans and Black Sea Commission and participated in the meeting of the Marine Resources Group of the North Sea Commission. The CPMR Blue Acceleration Platform initiative eventually climaxed with the intercommission seminar “Ports as hubs of the Blue Economy” during the CPMR General Assembly 2022, when perspectives from all CPMR sea basins were shared and actions at EU level discussed.
The Atlantic Arc Commission also contributed to the AspBAN bootcamp, which brought more than 35 Blue Startups to Lisbon for a three-day programme of matchmaking sessions and workshops with ports authorities and investors. For this occasion, the Atlantic Arc Commission produced a database of Atlantic regional support and services to help Blue enterprises to grow in the Atlantic area.

Read the policy recommendation!
Submission of a project proposal on the decarbonisation of maritime transports

Under the Interreg Atlantic Area programme, the Atlantic Arc Commission supported the submission of a project proposal aiming to create and develop an Atlantic network of maritime transport sector to provide the tools, knowledge and structure needed to rapidly meet the challenge of reducing the pollutant emissions of the waterborne transportation in the Atlantic Area. The proposal was led by Pole Mer Bretagne Atlantique, based in Brittany region. If successful, the Atlantic Arc Commission will lead actions to connect the project's results to regional and EU policies. The regions of Brittany, Pays de la Loire, Lisboa e Vale do Tejo and Donegal County Council expressed their interest to be an associated partner of the project. Surfrider, a non-profit organisation located in Nouvelle Aquitaine and leader of the Green Marine Europe Certification scheme for shipping companies supported also the application which marked the start of a cooperation with the AAC on maritime decarbonisation.

Participation in the actions of the Atlantic Strategy Pillar I

The AAC Secretariat also joined in 2023 the Atlantic Strategy Pillar I Task Force on “Ports as hub of the Blue Economy” on behalf of its members. The task force, chaired by Carlos Botana, Blue growth director of the Port of Vigo, launched a new orientation with a focus on maritime transport decarbonization. If selected, the SMARTDEC project will directly contribute to the Task Force’s work.
ENHANCING THE AAC VISIBILITY: figures

6 on-going projects

- ASPBAN
- BLUEMISSIONAA
- CLEANATLANTIC
- FANBEST
- FLORES
- SAFER

Representing a community of 73 Atlantic partners.

12 representatives of the EU institutions met thanks to AAC events

- EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
- DG REGIO
- DG MARE
- DG MOVE

3 declarations

- POLITICAL DECLARATION OF THE ATLANTIC ARC COMMISSION - DONOSTIA
  May 2022
- PLEDGE OF THE ATLANTIC ARC COMMISSION IN FAVOUR OF A CLEAN ATLANTIC OCEAN
  May 2022
- ASPBAN POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
  July 2022

6 high-level representatives of Atlantic national governments met in AAC events

Organisation of 13 meetings and events connecting the AAC with 19 speakers from non-governmental organizations from the Atlantic community

Regular cooperation with sister associations such as Atlantic Cities, RTA-ATN and les CESER de l’Atlantique

the Atlantic Arc Commission Roadmap to define...

- GOVERNANCE OF EXISTING MACRO-REGIONS AND POSSIBLE SCENARIOS FOR THE ATLANTIC
- ATLANTIC RIS3: COMMONALITIES, DIFFERENCES AND WAY FORWARD TO BOOST COOPERATION
- EU NATURE RESTORATION LAW: STAKES FROM AN ATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE