ACTIVITY REPORT
2023 - 2024
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Dear Members of the Atlantic Arc Commission,

Following our 2023 Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly in Cardiff, I must highlight that our cooperation has been growing ever since and has delivered very valuable and concrete actions. Once again, we successfully expressed our key messages in our annual Political Declaration and demonstrated the vital role of our territories in connecting Atlantic communities and tackling common challenges together, despite borders. I must salute Rt Hon Mark Drakeford MT, First Minister of Wales for his continuous commitment to the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission and wish him the best for his future endeavours.

My mandate at the head of the Basque Government will soon come to an end and, with it, my status as the President of this Atlantic Arc Commission. At this point, I would like to express my gratitude for the trust you have placed in the Basque Government, as well as to reaffirm my outmost commitment to continue to support the achievement of our priorities and ambitions for the Atlantic area until that moment arrives.

This report allows a time for assessment of our actions. Together in 2023 we confirmed our forward-thinking vision on the future of the Atlantic Arc and implemented concrete actions to achieve it. In order to continue our long-lasting cooperation with Atlantic non-EU regions, we welcomed Québec among our associated Members and launched a Trans-Atlantic pilot project supported by the European Parliament. We kept defending our vision to improve the multi-level governance of the Atlantic area to better tackle challenges jointly for our sustainable development.

With a series of bilateral exchanges with EU Representatives, we pursue our lobbying in favour of the creation of an Atlantic Macro-Region. In Cardiff, we voted an important declaration that sketches our vision of the ideal Atlantic Macro-Region: it should not only focus maritime sectors development, but also with transport, energy and digital connectivity, response to climate change and innovation in smart specialisation sectors. On 12 December 2023, thanks to constant contacts with the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Atlantic Macro-Region was included in the agenda of the General Affairs Council, which opens the door for a Council work on the matter. I thank the Presidents of the member territories of this Atlantic Arc Commission for their commitment to promote our project to the governments of the Atlantic states.

The completion of the TEN-T negotiations marked a significant milestone in our efforts to develop an Atlantic Blue and Green Transport Corridor. We also opened an important EU discussion on building a common EU strategy for ports, contributing to a SEArica event in the European Parliament on Atlantic Ports as hubs of the Blue Economy. We also engaged in the EU negotiations on legislations aiming at preventing plastic pollution to make sure that future regulations can properly address ocean pollution, on which our regions are at the forefront. We also improve our mutual knowledge with exchanges of best practices on the decarbonisation of the Atlantic fleet, the funding of offshore renewable energy projects, innovations “made in the Atlantic” and sustainable tourism.

We have acknowledged that Europe’s centre of gravity is shifting eastwards, and therefore we have constantly worked towards a reinforced cohesion in the Atlantic area. More than ever, we need the support of all levels of governance, at EU, state, regional, and local levels, to ensure that the Atlantic is not relegated to the second plan in European priorities of development. It is now time to ensure the support of the Atlantic states and the Belgian Presidency to further advance on this project.

I advocate that the CAA continue to consider the Atlantic Macro-region as an emblematic initiative of our organization and persevere in the achievement of the project, so that the Atlantic is once again, placed at the top of the European agenda to achieve the best well-being for its citizens. I also wish CCDR Alentejo I.P. great success in hosting the 2024 Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly in Sines, which will mark a key step for continued efforts in shaping 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
ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

of the Atlantic Arc Commission

President
Iñigo Urkullu

1st Vice-President
Maria Teresa Mourão de Almeida

General Assembly

Political Steering Group

Executive Secretariat

Atlantic Strategy

Maritime

Attractivity

Atlantic Strategy
AAC Secretariat

Exploration of the Atlantic Macro-Region
Basque Country

Cooperation with non EU Regions
Wales

Marine Renewable Energies
Basque Country

Fisheries/Aquaculture
Pays de la Loire

Ocean Pollution
CCDR Norte

Innovation
CCDR Lisboa e Vale do Tejo

Transport
Basque Country

Tourism & Culture
Cantabria

ATLANTIC ARC COMMISSION | 5
THE SECRETARIAT
of the Atlantic Arc Commission

Elise Wattrelot,
Executive Secretary of the Atlantic Arc Commission since 2020

Catherine Petiau,
Policy Assistant since 2013

Mathilde Maure,
Policy and Project Officer since June 2023

Wim Stubbe,
Project Manager since March 2024
Atlantic Regions, pioneers in rethinking multi-level governance and cooperation frameworks in the Atlantic Area

Political Priorities:
- To make the Atlantic Maritime Strategy evolve towards an Atlantic Macro-Region;
- To make the most of EU instruments and EU policies for the benefit of the Atlantic Regions;
- To enhance the political visibility of the Atlantic Arc Commission at the European level and increase interregional partnerships.

General successes:
- Support from the Spanish Presidency to the creation of an Atlantic Macro-Region expressed in the General Affairs Council of 12 December 2023;
- Support of Members of the European Parliament to push Member States to work on a mandate for the Atlantic Macro-Region during the Belgian Presidency of the Council;
- Renewed contacts with the French Government on the Atlantic Macro-Region;
- Support of key Atlantic civil society networks in favour of the Atlantic Macro-Region;
- Launch of the TRANSATLANTIC project financed by the European Parliament to elaborate a cooperation scheme between EU Regions and non-EU Regions on the other side of the Atlantic.

I. Advancing together towards an Atlantic Macro-Regional Strategy

The Cardiff Declaration: a landmark in the AAC reflexion on the Atlantic Macro-Region

During the Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly of Cardiff in May 2023, Atlantic Regions adopted the Cardiff Declaration, joining forces to call for the creation of an Atlantic Macro-Region.
This declaration sketches the contour of the key priorities the Macro-Region should encompass as well as the multi-level governance model it should apply. The Cardiff Declaration is the result of a consultation of the AAC Regions launched at the end of 2022.

Fruitful collaborations at a high political level to advance on the Atlantic Macro-Region

Throughout the duration of the Spanish presidency of the Council, President Urkullu regularly exchanged with the Spanish Secretary of State on Atlantic needs, challenges, and increased will for cooperation at a multi-level scale thanks to the potential creation of the Atlantic Macro-Region.

On 12 October 2023, the French Atlantic Member Regions also developed actions to promote the Atlantic Macro-Region initiative to their government. The three Presidents sent a letter to the Secretary of State Laurence Boone and the Secretary of State Hervé Berville to ask the support of the French government in this respect.

- We also made progress on cooperation on Offshore Renewable Energies. Our debate supported a reflection around the building up of an Atlantic industrial value chain around offshore renewable energies. As suggested by the Presidency, it will nurture a concept paper for a flagship project. We learnt about local experiences of adapting skills of citizens to the green transition in the Atlantic. Our discussions set the first step for further cooperation on future cooperation.

All of these efforts resulted in the inclusion by the Spanish Presidency of a point of information in the agenda for the General Affairs Council. According to the Spanish Presidency, interested Atlantic Member States agreed to explore the set of an Atlantic Macro-Region during the Belgian Presidency starting in January 2024.
Following this announcement, AAC Regions continued their lobbying efforts:

- As new CPMR President, Loïg Chesnais Girard sent another letter to Secretary of State Laurence Boone to further support the Atlantic Macro-Region in December 2023.

- President Chesnais Girard, President Morançais, and President Rousset sent another letter to the newly nominated Secretary of State for EU affairs, Jean-Noël Barrot and Secretary of State for the sea, Hervé Berville in April 2024.

- President Urkullu met with Commissioner Ferreira, January 2024. Presenting the Atlantic Macro-Region as a way to enhance the development of the Atlantic area and represent its interest in Europe, President Urkullu asked for official support from the European Commission.

- Maria Angeles Elorza Zubiria met with Director Tokarski on 28 February 2024 to ensure the full support of DG REGIO with regards Atlantic Arc Commission endeavours to create an Atlantic Macro-

Region. Director Tokarski reaffirmed that if Atlantic Member States deliberate on this issue, the Commission will bring its full support to the development of the Macro-Region.

- Following the close contacts established with MEP Younous Omarjee on the Atlantic Macro-Region, he was able to ask Minister-President Elio di Rupo to include the Atlantic Macro-Region in the Belgian Presidency’s agenda during a hearing organised by REGI Committee on 23 January 2024.

- Thanks to close contacts maintained with French MEPs from the Renew Party, they took the initiative to send a letter to the Secretaries of States Barrot and Berville to ask for the support of the French Government to the Atlantic Macro-Region. The letter was signed by MEP Laurence Farreng, MEP Valérie Hayer, President of the Renew Party at the European Parliament, MEP Pierre Karleskind, MEP Catherine Chabaud, and MEP Marie-Pierre Vedrenne.
In addition to these political actions, the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat represented the views of the Atlantic Regions in various events at national level throughout the year to promote the creation of an Atlantic Macro-Region:

- **Meeting with Minister Faure at the Congress of French Regions, September 2023.** The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat joined, along with Brittany Region, discussions with Minister Faure (Minister Delegate in charge of Territorial Collectivities) on the creation of the Atlantic Macro-Region as a tool to strengthen cooperation in the Atlantic both with EU and non-EU Regions.

- **Meeting with the Cabinet of the French Minister Delegate in charge of Territorial Collectivities and Rural affairs, October 2023.** The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat followed-up the exchanges of September 2023 and set up a meeting with the Cabinet of Minister Faure to discuss the AAC vision on the Atlantic Macro-Region. An openness was expressed by the Cabinet on the political project.

Enhancing the AAC collaboration with relevant fora on the Atlantic Macro-Region

Over the past year, the Atlantic Arc Commission multiplied exchanges with various stakeholders from the Atlantic, exchanging views on the creation of the Atlantic Macro-Region and gathering knowledge and perspectives from different sectors.

- **Launching a new collaboration with the Atlantic Network of Chambers of Commerce, June 2023.** Created in Summer 2023, this network gathering 17 Chambers of Commerce from Spain, Portugal and France, voted a declaration in favour of the creation of the Atlantic Macro-Region and expressed their support to the Atlantic Arc Commission. The President of the Bilbao Chamber of Commerce who has led the creation of the network participated in the AAC Plenary Session in November in Saint-Malo to present the vision and the missions of the network. It will also aim also at boosting the Atlantic Area’s visibility and economic development via the development of joint projects.
- A report on the Atlantic Macro-Region, October 2023. The Regional economic, social and environmental council of the Atlantic area (CESER de l’Atlantique) adopted a report named “The Atlantic Macro-Region: an opportunity to be seized? Perspectives from the Atlantic CESER”. Following various exchanges between the CESER and the Atlantic Arc Commission, this document lays down the advantages of the Macro-Region, emphasizing the need to include the civil society in this multilevel governance framework. The rapporteur of the report participated in the AAC Plenary Session in Saint-Malo in November 2023 to share the main conclusions.

- Collaboration with Atlantic universities, November 2023. The AAC plenary session in Saint-Malo was also the occasion to connect with the CRUSOE network, gathering universities from the Southwest of Europe wishing to develop cooperation on key smart specialization sectors. The Rector of the University of Cantabria, and President of CRUSOE, conveyed his support to the Atlantic Macro-Region and the interest of the network to extend to the overall Atlantic façade.

Continuing the AAC think tank work on the added value of an Atlantic Macro-Region

The AAC has continuously worked towards gathering knowledge on the opportunity to create an Atlantic Macro-Region. In particular it continued the structural dialogue with existing Macro-Regions, it submitted an application to the ESPON programme and connected with a series of relevant initiatives of the academic world.

- Launching an ESPON Targeted Analysis aiming at building orientations for the development of an Atlantic Macro-Region. The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat made a suggestion to ESPON programme to develop an analysis on how an Atlantic Macro-Region could reduce obstacles of cooperation to foster the sustainable territorial development of the Atlantic area. The selected applicant will analyse and map current socio-economic and environmental patterns and trends in the Atlantic, analyse the obstacles and identify potential areas for cooperation among Atlantic territories, and will finally develop policy recommendations to support policy decisions, on all levels of governance.
• Sharing experiences on the governance of existing Macro-Regions. In February 2024, the Atlantic Arc Commission auditioned the pillar coordinator of the Baltic Macro-Region to gain useful knowledge on governance mechanisms enabling the alignment of funding with the objectives of the Macro-Region. This discussion helped AAC Regions to further explore the ideal governance structure they would like to have in the Atlantic Macro-Region.

• A Summer School to explore the advantages of an Atlantic Macro-Region, September 2023. The Atlantic Arc Commission took part in the summer course organised by the Menéndez Pelayo International University (UIMP) and Government of Cantabria, in the framework of the Spanish Presidency of the Council. Harnessing the work of different researchers on the features that the Atlantic Macro-Region should have, the seminar was also the occasion for the Spanish Presidency to reaffirm its support to the project.

II. Cooperation with non-EU Regions: welcoming a new Member and developing a pilot project

Closing the Atlantic Arc Commission’s work on the Brexit

Working on Brexit since 2017, the Atlantic Arc Commission Brexit Task Force, led by Galicia Region, has been very active in the development of analyses and lobbying actions to minimize the impact of Brexit on regions. The AAC Task Force was pioneer to suggest the creation of a Brexit Adjustment Reserve and to meet Michel Barnier, negotiator of the EU on Brexit.

In the last years of existence, the AAC Task Force contributed to the CPMR reflection on the Brexit Adjustment Reserve (BAR) legislation, promoting a strong role for regions in its implementation. As a conclusion of its work, it organised together with the North Sea Commission, a joint workshop in September 2023 to exchange experiences in this respect.
Concrete actions to strengthen transatlantic cooperation

Under the leadership of the Welsh Government, the AAC Task Force on Cooperation with non-EU Regions, launched the TRANSATLANTIC pilot project, co-funded by the European Parliament. This precursor scheme should foster transatlantic cooperation in view of delivering the Green deal locally in the Atlantic Arc territories. The main expected results are the expansion and strengthening of contacts between regions, SMEs, clusters and universities from both sides of the Atlantic.

Led by the Atlantic Arc Commission, this project involves as partners CEIMAR and Forum Oceano who will have the task to attract an ecosystem of Atlantic universities, clusters and SMEs in the implementation of the project. The project will develop two on-field visits in Québec and in Wales to boost cooperation on Green Marine Infrastructures and climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Atlantic Arc Commission Members will be able to directly benefit from the organisation of these two on-field visits and take the opportunity to assess possible new cooperations.
Welcoming a new Member aboard the Atlantic Arc Commission

Keen to further establish strong relationships with EU and non-EU Regions, the Atlantic Arc Commission welcomes Québec as an Associated Member.

- Québec joins the Atlantic Arc Commission, May 2023. Strongly involved in priority sectors such as port development, sustainable development of the maritime sector and coastal tourism, the Government of Québec became an Associated Member of the Atlantic Arc Commission. In 2024, Québec is planning to organise on-site visits to develop cooperation on green maritime infrastructure and climate change adaptation, as part of the TRANSATLANTIC project.
III. Continued collaboration and contribution to the Atlantic Maritime Strategy

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

As associated member of the Atlantic Strategy Committee (ASC), the Atlantic Arc Commission engaged in additional exchanges with the national authorities involved in the Atlantic Maritime Strategy to develop collaborations opportunities.

- **Passing reflections & messages to the Atlantic Strategy Committee.** In view of the writing of an Atlantic Ministerial Declaration, the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat presented the Cardiff Declaration during the second meeting of the Atlantic Strategy Committee in Lisbon in June 2023, chaired by the Portuguese Presidency. In line with Portugal’s intention to develop the international dimension of the strategy, it also presented its intentions with the TRANSATLANTIC pilot project of the European Parliament. In agreement with the new chair of the Atlantic Strategy, the AAC Secretariat was again invited to present an update of the pilot project in March 2024. The ASC chair manifested its interest in being regularly updated on the progress of the project and part of its Advisory Board. As France took over the presidency of the Strategy for 2024, it has expressed its intention to further engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including regional authorities, both in the EU and outside the EU.

- **Engaging in the Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Conference (ASCP), October 2023.** The AAC was represented at the last ASCP in October 2023 in Oporto. This was an occasion for the Basque Presidency to react to the newly adopted Ministerial Declaration which reaffirms the will of Atlantic States to cooperate on offshore renewable energies, decarbonisation, sustainable coastal tourism, aquaculture and shipbuilding, upskilling and reskilling workers, cross sea-basin cooperation. The Atlantic Arc Commission welcomed this Declaration which contains key topics of common interest but reaffirmed the importance of operationalizing the strategy via the development of flagship projects and the need to better associate regions in the governance of the strategy.
Political priorities:
- Make the most of funding opportunities for the benefit of the Atlantic maritime sectors;
- Support the deployment of offshore renewable energies across the Atlantic;
- Enhance the political visibility of the Atlantic Arc Commission.

General successes:
- Contribution to EU debates on a comprehensive European port strategy thanks to the AspBAN project;
- Engagement in EU negotiations on the Regulation on Preventing Plastic Pellets Losses by sending a letter to EU institutions;
- Development of Regional Policy Toolkits and Recommendations emanating from Atlantic maritime projects to support the uptake of their deliverables in regional contexts;
- Launch of a new cooperation project on the decarbonisation of the Atlantic fleet;
- Exchanges on funding mechanisms to support the Offshore Renewable Energy sector;
- Participation in key maritime events over the year, both political and technical.

I. Strengthening Atlantic maritime industries

Promoting the role of ports as hubs of the sustainable blue economy in the European Parliament

Concluding several years of work through the EU-funded project AspBAN, the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat co-organised a SEArica intergroup event in June 2023 with MEP Deirdre Clune, SEArica Vice-Chair for the Atlantic, to share the project’s results.
The AAC, represented by the Basque Country, presented the AspBAN Policy Recommendations, endorsed by the Members and AspBAN partners few weeks ago. While the ports of Algeciras and Bilbao as well as the SME AllRead were able to present what they gained out of the AspBAN project.

Several representatives of the EU institutions such as Christos Economou, Head of Unit for Sea Basin Strategies, Maritime Regional Cooperation and Maritime Security, DG MARE, Eddy Limageois, Head of Unit for Transport Networks, DG MOVEand MEP Josianne Cutajar, SEArica Vice-Chair for SMEs and Digitalisation shared their views on the future of ports on this occasion.

The event gave concrete outcomes since the European Parliament voted in January 2024 on an own-initiative report “a comprehensive EU strategy for ports”. Debate in TRAN Committee, which led the report, involved considerations of the role of ports as hub of the Blue economy.

Making the Atlantic Area a leader on Marine Renewable Energies

In the face of the growing challenges to produce renewable energy and the Atlantic’s strategic assets, the Atlantic Arc Commission supported a number of actions to promote the deployment of offshore renewable energies over the year.

- The Atlantic Arc Commission Marine Renewable Energies Working Group, led by the Basque Government, initiated a work on mapping existing funding mechanisms developed at regional level to support offshore renewable energy projects development. Members also monitored the Atlantic Strategy Pillar III to find possible synergies.

- The AAC participated in the FLORES project on upskilling and reskilling of Atlantic communities to adapt to the needs of the offshore renewable energy sector. The project is a flagship project of the EU Pact for Skills on Offshore Renewable Energies. The project was featured during the CPMR Seminar on
Offshore Renewable Energies organised on 16 November in Saint-Malo, back-to-back with the CPMR 50th anniversary. It was the occasion to present the aim of the project to the CPMR Members and allow them to join the Community of Users. This Community is open for stakeholders to join and it should support Member Regions to monitor the results of the projects and use them for their own work on skills in the offshore renewable energies. Throughout 2024, the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat will contribute to the development of FLORES Recommendations on how to overcome the barriers to the creation of durable partnerships on training in the offshore renewable energies sector.

Initiating a work on the decarbonisation of the Atlantic fleet

As a result of the European Commission’s initiative of the energy transition in the fishing sector and the adoption of the Fit for 55 package, the Atlantic Arc Commission launched a new project on the greening of the Atlantic fleet and took part in different initiatives at EU level.

- A questionnaire on the state of decarbonisation of the Atlantic fishing fleet, January 2024. Taking the lead of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Working Group, Pays de la Loire Region launched a questionnaire to collect regional data on the decarbonisation of the fishing fleet. The Atlantic Regions shared that most of their fleet is around 30 years old, therefore requiring important investments while ensuring the sustainability of the fishing activity and the welfare of fishermen. Member Regions will further deepen their position on this topic to be able to feed the policy position of the CPMR to be adopted in the General Assembly in October 2024 and linked to the European Commission Energy Transition Partnership.
• Kicking-off the SMARTDEC project, March 2024. This project co-funded by Interreg Atlantic Area with a budget of more than 2 million euros, kicked off in March 2024 and will last until December 2026. Gathering 8 partners from Ireland, France, Portugal and Spain, it will aim at identifying start-ups and SMEs in the Atlantic area to provide technical solutions to shipbuilders to decarbonise the fleet. The Atlantic Arc Commission, through this project, will lead the Work Package 5 on capitalisation activities and will organise a series of workshops with Atlantic Regions (and beyond) to share views on decarbonisation between regional authorities and local stakeholders. The final goal is to release policy recommendations on how to increase, finance and develop decarbonisation options for vessels based on Atlantic needs. The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat will also share the results of the project with EU institutions, notably during the final high-level event planned at the end of 2026.

• Link with the Atlantic Strategy Pillar I event, July 2023. The coordinator of Pillar I "Ports as Gateways and Hubs of the Blue Economy", Carlos Botana, President of the Port of Vigo, hosted a first discussion on how to boost the decarbo-nisation of ports and the fishing sector in which the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat participated. A report on possible prototype solutions was designed as a result of the meeting. Further consultations will be performed to consolidate proposals to inspire future calls of the European Commission.

• Representing CPMR in Green Marine Europe, June 2023. The CPMR joined the Green Marine Europe certification as an Associated Member, in line with its political orientations to achieve a greener maritime transport sector. This certification aims at accompanying shipbuilders in their transition for a more sustainable modes of transports. The Atlantic Arc Commission, represented by the Basque Country, took part in the Green Marine Summit organised by Surfrider Fountain Europe in Bilbao, gathering ports authorities, regional and national authorities and shipping companies to discuss the decarbonation of the maritime transport. It shared perspectives for decarbonisation at the regional level, in line with AFIR and FuelEU Maritime.
Exploring synergies and cooperation between Atlantic Blue S3

Following preliminary analyses on most common Blue Smart Specialisations in the Atlantic, the AAC valorise its knowledge into different actions.

- AAC workshop to develop a Strong Atlantic Network of Blue Innovations, June 2023. The Atlantic Arc Commission and CCDR Lisboa e Vale do Tejo organised a workshop to discuss ways to develop a Strong Atlantic Network of Blue Innovations, harnessing the experience developed in the FANBEST project (Interreg Atlantic Area). Hosted by President Almeida, First Vice-President of the Atlantic Arc Commission, the workshop gathered a variety of stakeholders including start-ups, researchers, maritime clusters and investors to discuss on bottlenecks and ways to boost the capacity of Atlantic start-ups to grow and enhance regional development, further deepening multi-stakeholders collaborations. The workshop also aimed at consulting Atlantic stakeholders in the development of Policy Recommendations directed to EU institutions on how the boost blue innovations for the benefit of regional development.

- Boosting innovation in the seafood sector – SAFER conclusion, June 2023. As part of its participation in the SAFER project, the Atlantic Arc Commission developed a Policy Toolkit to support regions in harnessing the development of new technologies tools and software to help seafood companies monitor, track and improve the lifecycle production.
II. Atlantic Regions at the forefront of the fight against Ocean Pollution and restoration of ecosystems

Reducing marine litter in the Atlantic

The Atlantic area, as a gateway for maritime transport to Europe, has faced several maritime incidents in the last years. In December 2023, Galicia, Asturias and Cantabria got covered with thousands of plastic pellets after the loss of a merchandise container. Earlier on, in January and February 2023, a similar incident took place on the coasts of Brittany, Pays de la Loire and Normandie Regions. Taking stock of this, the Atlantic Arc Commission stayed active to deal with marine pollution throughout the year.

- **AAC Letter on the Regulation on Preventing Plastic Pellet Losses, February 2024.** In light of the recent marine pollution incidents and the ongoing negotiations on the Regulation on Preventing Plastic Pellet Losses to reduce microplastic pollution, the Atlantic Arc Commission Ocean Pollution Working Group developed a letter which was then sent by the AAC President Urkullu to EU institutions inviting them to increase ambitions to properly address this problem, by reducing the threshold. In addition, the AAC Secretariat presented the AAC position on the regulation to President Ciambetti, rapporteur for the Committee of the Regions on the regulation in February 2024.

- **Multi-stakeholders collaboration on the reduction of marine pollutions, January 2024.** During the Atlantic Arc Commission Hub Meetings, the Ocean Pollution Working Group, chaired by CCDR Norte IP, welcomed Surfrider and CEDRE (Centre of expertise on ocean pollution) to debate on possible actions to take and strengthen collaborations. Members were able to learn more about available response assistance, training of local elected officials, surveillance, evaluation of the pollution and documentation of marine pollutions.

Read the Atlantic Arc Letter!
A Policy Toolkit to improve governance on the reduction of marine litter – CleanAtlantic Final event, June 2023. Closing six years of common work, CleanAtlantic consortium gathered in Vigo to share with around 400 people, its key achievements on reducing marine litter in the Atlantic. Setting the base for a transnational cooperation to understand the scale of the problem, partners develop monitoring tools to track marine litter, databases of resources, studies on risks and impacts, new waste management tools and cleaning solutions, while conducting awareness raising campaigns. The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat joined the event to present its work on capitalisation and shared the final version of the Clean Atlantic Policy Toolkit, aiming at guiding regional policy makers at adopting solutions to fight against marine litter.

Check out the toolkit!

AAC becomes associated partner to FreeLitterAT, January 2024. Prolonging the work of CleanAtlantic, the Atlantic Arc Commission joined the FreeLitterAT project as an associated partner. Co-funded by Interreg Atlantic Area, it will focus on developing new solutions for marine litter reduction in the Atlantic and deepening the findings of CleanAtlantic. The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat enabled the University Bretagne Occidentale and CIIMAR to integrate this new consortium as full partners.

EurOCEAN Side-Event on Plastic Pollution, October 2023. The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat took part in the EurOCEAN conference in Vigo and in a side-event on plastic pollution organised by the LabPlas project on 9 October. Invited to present the state of international and European policies on plastic pollution, the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat took the occasion to display the results of the CleanAtlantic project, in particular the Regional Policy toolkit to fight marine pollution and the Pledge on Ocean Pollution.
Engaging in the work of the Ocean Mission

- **BlueMissionAA awarded as best project, October 2023.** Presented during the Atlantic Strategy Platform Conference in November 2023, the BlueMissionAA project in which the Atlantic Arc Commission is part of, received the award for the best Atlantic project in the category "Healthy Oceans and Resilient Coasts". It was also the occasion to present more in detail the project and display the valuable transnational contributions for the preservation of marine ecosystems. The AAC will contribute to the project by developing Recommendations for further alignment between RIS3 and the Ocean Mission objectives. A draft document will be shared with Atlantic Members over the course of 2024.

- **Event of the French Minister for Higher Education and Research "Horizon Europe Mission Day Regenerating our oceans and waters", January 2024.** Invited by the Minister to participate to a roundtable on how to increase the participate of French stakeholders to the Mission Ocean, the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat raised concerns and solutions to ease the process of participation of Regions in the Mission, both as partners or as associated Regions. It was the occasion to discuss with various French stakeholders and with Ms Elisabetta Balzi (DG RTD) on the need to ease the procedure for involving Regions in the Mission.
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 priorities 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 the new TEN-T maps to improve accessibility of the Atlantic area;
- Launching data collection for the creation of a catalogue of “Innovations “made in Atlantic” and initiation of a work on an Atlantic Hydrogen Valley;
- Data collection and exchanges of best practices on sustainable tourism in the Atlantic.

I. Atlantic victories in the TEN-T negotiations

Following years of negotiations between the CPMR and EU legislators on the TEN-T Regulation, the new TEN-T Regulation reached a provisional agreement in December 2023.

Among novelties, 6 out of the 17 Atlantic Arc Commission’s amendments to the map were accepted, including:
- The inclusion of a part of the railway section connecting the South part of Spain and Portugal;
- The inclusion of railway crossborder section between Galicia and Norte in the Extended Core Network;
- The inclusion of the port of Santander to the CORE network;
- The inclusion of the Rail Road terminal of the Basque Country Agglomeration in France;
- The completion of the Irish network through the railway section Galway-Sligo;
- The inclusion of the port of Galway in the comprehensive network.

The new legislation brought important improvements for the Atlantic connectivity, enabling parts of the Atlantic Arc to foresee a less peripheral situation and a greater attractiveness potential.
The Basque Government, as the leader of the Transport Working of the Atlantic Arc Commission, conducted a meeting in February 2024, involving Julie Buy, adviser to the Atlantic coordinator (DG MOVE) to understand the changes of the new regulation, especially those which concern the governance of the TEN-T and upcoming negotiations on transport policy.

II. Developing cooperation for an Atlantic sustainable tourism

Restating the importance of sustainable tourism on Atlantic coasts, Cantabria Government took over the leadership of the Tourism and Culture Working Group in November 2023. Calling on sharing best practices between Atlantic Regions, Cantabria launched a questionnaire to gather the Atlantic Arc Commission’s Members insights on how to plan and manage a tourism governance, in line with sustainable development goals. Aiming at organising a seminar on Atlantic tourism in the second semester of 2024, Member Regions will have the occasion to deepen this topic over the year.
III. Boosting an innovation ecosystem in the Atlantic

Collaborating for a strong Atlantic innovation ecosystem

While the Council of the European Union called in December 2023 for a stronger role of local and regional authorities in securing competitive research and innovation ecosystems, the Atlantic Arc Commission Innovation Working Group, led by CCDR Lisboa e Vale do Tejo, worked towards the development of interregional partnerships for innovation.

It launched a work to build-up a Catalogue of Innovations “Made in Atlantic”, initiating discussions on the criteria to retain for the selection of key innovations for the Atlantic area. Another session will be organised during the General Assembly of the Atlantic Arc Commission in April 2024.

Initiating a work on an Atlantic hydrogen valley

Taking stock of the need to boost the innovation ecosystem in the Atlantic and to develop new solutions to attract investors and stakeholders, the Atlantic Arc Commission joined the AdvancedH2Valley project as an associated partner. Launched in January 2024, the project gathered 18 members, the project has received an 8.9 million euro grant from the European Commission through the Clean Hydrogen Partnership.

Thanks to this project, the Atlantic Arc Commission will be positioned to anticipate and contribute to the preparation of an Atlantic Large Scale Hydrogen Valley, further ensuring the attractiveness of the territory.
THE ATLANTIC ARC COMMISSION  in figures

4 on-going projects as a full partner
BLUEMISSIONAA
FLORES
SMARTDEC
TRANSATLANTIC

12 representatives of the EU institutions met through AAC Events
EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR COHESION AND REFORMS, MS ELISA FERREIRA
DG REGIO, MR SLAWOMIR TOKARSKI AND MR STEFAN APPEL
DG MOVE, MS JULIE BUY, MR EDDY LIEGEOIS
DG MARE, MR CHRISTOS ECONOMOU
DG RTD, MS ELISABETTA BALZI
MEPS YOUNOUS OMARJEE, JOSIANE CUTAJAR, DEIRDRE CLUNE, JAVIER MORENO SÁNCHEZ, JOÃO PIMENTA LOPES

2 on-going projects as an associated partner
ADVANCEDH2VALLEY
FREELITTERAT

2 high-level representatives of Atlantic national governments met in AAC events
SPANISH SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION, MR PASCUAL NAVARRO
FRENCH MINISTER FOR TERRITORIAL COLLECTIVITIES, MS DOMINIQUE FAURE

2 declarations
CARDIFF POLITICAL DECLARATION MAY 2023
FANBEST POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OCTOBER 2023

Regular cooperation with sister organisations
ATLANTIC NETWORK OF CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE
RTA-ATN CESER DE L’ATLANTIC
CRUSOE ATLANTIC CITIES