Introduction

All hands on deck: the Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly is approaching!

This year we will reunite in Cardiff, Wales on May 23-24. Coming together outside of the EU for the first time after Brexit, this General Assembly reaffirms the significant role of the Atlantic Arc Commission in keeping Atlantic regions close to one another and facilitate stable cooperation in the EU Atlantic and beyond. This will also be an opportunity to assess our advancements, celebrate our successes, and nurture our reflection on the way forward.

In order to warm you up for the General Assembly, we are happy to share the latest developments of the AAC in this Flash Info.

We wish you a pleasant reading and look forward to meeting all of you very soon in Cardiff,

The Atlantic Arc Secretariat, Elise Wattrelot, AAC Executive Secretary
Delphine Kaczorowski, Projects & Policy Officer
Catherine Petiau, Policy Assistant
On March 01, AAC regions gathered at Nouvelle-Aquitaine’s representation in Brussels to participate in a political working seminar, drawing the next steps to take towards the creation of an Atlantic Macro-Region. Presidents of Regions and Regional Councilors were able to discuss governance models for the future Macro-Region and assess the potential of new priorities of cooperation beyond the four pillars already identified in the Atlantic Action Plan 2.0.

Learn more

The AAC Political Seminar on the Atlantic Macro-Region

On March 13, Iñigo Urkullu, President of Basque Country Government and President of the Atlantic Arc Commission, invited 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. This meeting, organised within the framework of Basque Country’s presidential mandate to the Atlantic Arc Commission, enabled the four presidents to confirm their call for the creation of an Atlantic Macro-Region based on multi-level governance and to explore strategic areas of cooperation. They are aiming for the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council to set this shared political impetus into motion.

Learn more

Presidents from Basque Country, Galicia, Asturias and Cantabria meet and reaffirm their call for an Atlantic Macro-Region

On March 29, Iñigo Urkullu, President of Basque Country Government and President of the Atlantic Arc Commission, invited Mark Drakeford, First Minister of Wales. They welcomed the decisive opportunity of the AAC General Assembly of Cardiff to continue the collaboration on the Atlantic Macro-Region. Iñigo Urkullu expressed ambition to collaborate on economic and demographic challenges and climate change. This visit reinforces the close relationships that Basque Country Government has nurtured with Wales, considering Wales as a strategic region in its regional internationalisation strategy. A Memorandum of Understanding had already been signed between in 2018.

Learn more (Spanish)

Meeting of the President of the Basque Country and First Minister of Wales

We remind AAC Working Group leaders to draft their workplan in preparation for the AAC General Assembly 2023.
UPDATE ON THE ATLANTIC STRATEGY

Feedback from the 1st Atlantic Strategy Committee Meeting under the Portuguese Presidency 2023

On March 30, the AAC Secretariat participated in the first Atlantic Strategy Committee meeting under the Portuguese Presidency. For 2023, the Portuguese Presidency will call an Atlantic Ministerial Meeting on October 18, which should sign off a Ministerial Declaration on the challenges and opportunities to tackle by the Atlantic Strategy. Portugal will also boost the international dimension of the Strategy and connect it with other non-EU States. It will also work on funding opportunities for Atlantic stakeholders. The Interreg Atlantic Area programme was represented in this meeting by Sandra Silva, representative of the Managing Authority of the programme.

DEVELOPMENT OF A TRANSATLANTIC PILOT PROJECT: DELIVERING GREEN TRANSITION LOCALLY

Meeting of the Task Force on Cooperation with non-EU Regions

On March 24, the AAC Task-Force on Cooperation with non-EU regions gathered for a meeting chaired by Derek Vaughn, Wales Special Envoy to the EU. This meeting aimed at further designing the activities of the transatlantic pilot project. This project, initially conceptualised by the AAC, was made possible thanks to the support of MEP Younous Omarjee at the European Parliament.

This project, which will be developed together with DG REGIO for two years, will enable regions to be at the core of the development of transatlantic cooperation in favour of a healthy Atlantic Ocean. This pilot aims to be a precursor of transnational cooperation at transatlantic level, supporting regions in their endeavour to promote their assets internationally.

Stay tuned, the AAC is working towards its official kick-off!
Meeting with Welsh Minister for Economy in REGI Committee

On April 25, Vaughan Gething, Minister for Economy of Wales, was invited in REGI Committee to share his views on the future of cooperation beyond Brexit. On this occasion, he recalled Wales’ firm support to nurture strong cooperation with EU partners. MEP Younous Omarjee, President of the REGI Committee and strong advocate for the creation of an Atlantic Macro-Region, underlined the importance of the forthcoming Spanish Presidency of the EU Council and the opportunities it represented to maintain cooperation between Wales and EU Atlantic regions. Read the full article here

MARITIME AFFAIRS

Horizon Europe Calls on Offshore Renewable Energy

Following the AAC Letter to Commissioner Sinkevicius in February 2022 to dedicate more funding under Horizon Europe on ocean energies, the European Commission adopted in December 2022 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. Two calls are currently open:

- Cross-basin topic - Innovative nature-inclusive concepts to reconcile offshore renewables with ocean protection
- Cross-basin topic - Analysis of the obstacles and opportunities for repurposing aged/unused offshore infrastructures, to analyse options to decommission offshore platforms.

Deadline for both calls is set on September 20, 2023.

Ocean Pollution: Norte to sign the EU Ocean Mission Charter

To promote the work of the AAC Ocean Pollution Working Group at EU level, CCDR-Norte adhered to the EU Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters” Charter launched by the European Commission and registered the AAC Pledge on Ocean Pollution voted in 2022 as a relevant action aligned with the objective of the Mission. With the Charter, the European Commission aims at giving a platform for actors to show their support for the Mission and take part in a joint European effort to protect the ocean and waters. By endorsing the Mission Charter, signatories become privileged interlocutors for the development of activities and events related to the Mission such as networking events, exchange of best practice, services and tools to contribute to the restoration of the ocean and waters. The charter is non-binding and does not set specific targets for signatories.
On 21 February the European Commission issued a non-legislative package dealing with the functioning of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and of the Common Organisation of the Markets in the fisheries and aquaculture products (COM). The package also included an Action Plan, for marine ecosystems restoration and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture management, and a communication presenting a set of initiatives to boost energy transition of the EU fisheries and aquaculture sector.

Regarding the report on the functioning of the CFP, the European Commission claimed the positive results achieved ten years after the entry into force of the last reform and rejected the policy option of a revision of the CFP's regulation by the end of this legislative mandate. In this respect the European Commission invited Member States, fisheries stakeholders and the scientific community to join a “Fisheries and Oceans Pact” to cooperate for the full implementation of the current legislative framework.

Highlighting the need to set up synergies between the CFP and the other environmental EU policies, the EC’s Action Plan invited Member States to commit to ambitious objectives for marine ecosystem, and biodiversity restoration and protection. In this respect it called for Member States to phase out mobile bottom fishing from all Natura 2000 areas since March 2024, with the final objective to ban it from all Marine Protected Areas by 2030.

Although they fully share the goal of sustainable management of marine living resources, representatives of EU fishing sector strongly reacted to the EC’s proposal to ban bottom mobile bottom fishing from MPAs by 2030. Hence, following several demonstrations by fishermen in countries such as France and Spain, the European Commission has recently pointed out that it is not going to adopt further restrictive measures targeting bottom mobile bottom fishing and that, since it is not a binding legal act, the Action Plan represents a “tool” at the hands of Member States, which can choose how to act to halt the loss of marine biodiversity and accelerate the full restoration and protection of EU MPAs.

Finally, the European Commission also announced the launch of a new multi-stakeholder Energy Transition Partnership (ETP) aiming to further identify barriers for the energy transition and explore solutions to address them. In this respect, ETP’s members will be invited to endorse a declaration to join forces to boost energy transition.

In addition to a close monitoring of the European debate on the package, the CPMR is currently producing an analysis which will specifically address CPMR challenges. A dedicated discussion will be held at the CPMR Political Bureau on 9 June, in Florence. Galicia Region has been appointed rapporteur for the Committee of the Regions on this Package.
On April 13, the European Parliament voted its report on the review of the TEN-T Regulation. The European Parliament’s report includes clear improvements for the Atlantic accessibility. The Inter-institutional negotiations will start during the last week of April and may reach a deal before the next European Parliament elections in May 2024.

Since 2019, the CPMR and its 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 (14 December 2021) already expressed more ambition for the Atlantic Corridor, with notable additional sections.

The CPMR policy positions and meetings with MEPs and representatives of the EU presidencies also contributed to influence the positions of the two other EU legislators. 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 incorporate many more.

To discover the successful Atlantic additions and the way forward, read the full article here.
**THROWBACK ON CPMR LATEST EVENTS**

**CPMR Political Bureau Meeting in Cartagena, Spain**

On the occasion of the CPMR Political Bureau of Murcia held on March 9-10, the Presidency of the AAC, represented by Mikel Anton, Director General for External Affairs of the Basque Country presented to Pascual Navarro, Spanish Secretary of States for EU Affairs, the outcome of the AAC Political Working Seminar on the Atlantic Macro-Region. The Secretary of State expressed his support to the initiative and agreed to organise an event as part of the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council should it be adequate with the Atlantic regions and states concerned. Minutes of the Political Bureau soon available here.

**What do CPMR members expect about the future Cohesion Policy?**

On March 22-23, a special meeting of the Cohesion CORE group was organised in Linköping (Östergötland Region) in the context of the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU. On this occasion, 60 regional representatives in-situ and on-line joined their forces to set the ground towards defining the CPMR position on the future of cohesion policy. Iñaki Barredo, Vice-Minister for Economy and European Funds of the Basque Government, called for a simplification of procedures and further involvement of the regions in the design of Cohesion Policy objectives for optimal results.

Read the full CPMR article here and more about Mr Barredo’s intervention here.

Next CPMR Political Bureau will be held on June 8-9, in Florence, Tuscany.
CPMR/ AAC EVENTS

May 10, CPMR Cohesion Core Group meeting

May 23-24, Cardiff, Wales. AAC General Assembly

May 24, Brest, France.
- Final workshop of the SAFER project at the European Maritime Days, "Towards Industry 5.0"
- CPMR Workshop "Future Skills for Sustainable Blue Economy: What challenges and opportunities?"

May 30-31, Nantes, France. FANBEST Final event

June 8-9, Florence, Italy. CPMR Political Bureau

June 15, Lisbon, Portugal. Atlantic Strategy Committee Meeting


June 20-21, Vigo, Spain. CleanAtlantic Final event

June 27, Brussels, Belgium. ASPBAN Final event

November 15-17, Saint-Malo, France. CPMR General Assembly & AAC Plenary

EXTERNAL EVENTS

May 24-25, Brest, France. European Maritime Days

May 26, Brest, France. European Blue Forum

May 23 - June 08, Saint-Nazaire, France. The Arch 2023

30 June, Vigo, Spain. AAP2.0 Pillar 1 "Ports" Task Force Meeting

September 3-7, Bilbao, Spain. 15th European Wave and Tidal Energy Conference

October 10-11, Vigo, Spain. EurOCEAN 2023 Conference

October 17, Bilbao, Spain. Conference Green Marine on maritime transport decarbonisation.

October 18, Portugal. Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Conference and Atlantic Ministerial Meeting