



Minutes of the General Assembly of the Atlantic Arc Commission

2 & 3 March 2017- Les Sables d'Olonne (France)

THURSDAY 2 MARCH 2017

I. OPENING SESSION

Bruno Retailleau, President of the Atlantic Arc Commission and of Pays de la Loire Region, and **Brigitte Tesson**, 1st Deputy Mayor of Sables d'Olonne, welcomed the participants to the meeting. Following **Brigitte Tesson's** presentation, **Bruno Retailleau** and **Eleni Marianou**, Secretary General of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), addressed the meeting, evoking the challenges facing the Atlantic Regions and Europe. **Bruno Retailleau** was counting on a radical reform of the European project into what he termed a "Europe that gets results" to which the Atlantic Arc Commission should contribute.

Reviewing the first nine months of his presidency, **Bruno Retailleau** began by saying that inviting 25 students from the Lycée Tabarly (secondary school providing vocational training) to its General Assembly was one way in which the Atlantic Arc Commission was re-engaging the younger generation with the EU. Another was its successful bid for funding to develop a European master's degree in blue biotechnologies at La Rochelle University under DG MARE's Blue Careers call for proposals.

Pays de la Loire Region has organised a number of events and high-level meetings to enhance the visibility of the Atlantic Arc Commission with the European institutions and local stakeholders. **Bruno Retailleau** mentioned five events in particular:

- participation of Sébastien Pilard, Vice-President for the Blue Economy, at the Atlantic stakeholder platform conference in Dublin (Ireland) on 27 September 2016, and the high-level steering group for the Atlantic Strategy;
- the event organised in Nantes on [7 October 2016](#) aiming to make the Atlantic Arc Commission and the Atlantic Strategy known to more than 200 socio-economic stakeholders in the Pays de la Loire Region;
- presidency of the [session on transport](#) at the CPMR General Assembly in Ponta Delgada (Azores) by Bruno Retailleau on 3 November 2016;
- Bruno Retailleau's meeting with Karmenu Vella, Commissioner for Maritime Affairs, in the presence of First Minister of Wales Carwyn Jones and Alain Cadec MEP, [on 7 December 2016](#) in Brussels;
- Bruno Retailleau's meeting with the cabinet of the Commissioner in charge of cohesion policy, Corina Cretu, on 7 December 2016.

Following this introduction, the Assembly viewed a [video message from Commissioner Vella](#), in which he reaffirmed his commitment to the blue economy in Europe and especially in the Atlantic.

II. SESSION 1 – REPORT OF ACTIVITIES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE ATLANTIC ARC COMMISSION

Bruno Retailleau put to the vote the agenda for the meeting and the minutes of the plenary meeting of the Atlantic Arc Commission in Ponta Delgada on 3 November 2016, and then gave the floor to **Pauline Caumont**, Executive Secretary of the Atlantic Arc Commission, who presented the [report on activities](#). This was composed of five main points.

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The first point concerns the mobilisation of the Atlantic Arc Commission in favour of an integrated Atlantic Strategy. The Atlantic Arc Commission has played an active role in the ASG steering group, which has met six times since June 2016. It has used four high-level political events with European institutions to argue in favour of dedicated funding for this strategy.

The second point concerns the activities of the six working groups and the Transatlantic Task Force. These have met 17 times since last year, with a good level of regional participation. There are plans to rationalise the organisation of these groups so as to reduce the number of meetings.

The third point relates to the role played by the Atlantic Arc Commission in the work of the CPMR. The Atlantic Arc Commission has been represented at CPMR inter-Commission group meetings and at numerous meetings of the SEARICA intergroup in the European Parliament. It closely monitors the projects in which the CPMR is involved, such as [SIMNORAT](#) on maritime spatial planning in the European north Atlantic area. The CPMR's macro-regions Task Force, coordinated by **Pauline Caumont**, has capitalised on the work done by the Atlantic Arc Commission on the Atlantic Strategy.

Fourthly, the Atlantic Arc Commission's role in project development has been boosted with the launch of the project for [A Blue Biotechnology Master for a Blue Career](#), and the submission of five Interreg-Atlantic Area projects and one H2020 project, entitled OSCAR on the land-sea interface. The results of the selection procedure are not yet known.

Lastly, the Atlantic Arc Commission has played a role as observer on the Monitoring Committee for the Interreg-Atlantic Area Programme.

The Atlantic Arc Commission has enhanced its visibility, with a big increase in the number of followers on Twitter (more than 1000). The CPMR has also updated its website and newsletter.

During 2017-2018, we need to think about the share that project work should have in the activities of the working groups, as well as the results of the restructuring of the working groups.

→ [Link](#) to Pauline Caumont's PowerPoint presentation

Pauline Caumont then presented the financial perspectives for 2017. The level of membership fees has not changed since 2015. The Presidency has made a commitment to continue funding a post of policy officer under a VIE contract in the Atlantic Arc Commission secretariat. This contribution and the revenue from the Blue Career project have improved the Atlantic Arc Commission's financial situation. In the context of Brexit, it is planned to step up our approach to the Irish and British Regions.

Eleni Marianou mentioned here the CPMR's plan to meet with the Regions of the South of England. **Michael O'Brien**, speaking on behalf of Northern & Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) in Ireland, offered to help with this bringing together.

→ [Link](#) to Pauline Caumont's PowerPoint presentation

III. SESSION 2 – REPORT ON THE ATLANTIC ARC COMMISSION WORKING GROUPS

The [restructuring of the working groups](#), adopted by the Political Bureau, was submitted to the General Assembly. The aim is to rationalise the way the working groups are organised or to clarify the way they work. The thematic groups and the Task Force on Transatlantic Cooperation will now be spread across two hubs: "Maritime affairs" and "Accessibility & Attractiveness", corresponding to the CPMR's pillars of action. The Atlantic Strategy Task Force is maintained; its cross-cutting dimension will provide a link between the two hubs. A "Project Monitoring" Task Force will enable the Regions not directly involved in the Atlantic Arc Commission's European projects to benefit from the results of these.

Pauline Caumont mentioned Galicia's proposal to set up a Brexit Task Force as part of the Atlantic Strategy working group.

The restructuring will mean that meetings are held less frequently and will enable us to remobilise the member Regions of the Atlantic Arc Commission on both the political and technical level. The hubs will meet for one day during each EU semester, preferably just before the General Assembly and the Plenary meeting of the Atlantic Arc Commission. The Atlantic Strategy working group could meet more often, depending on the activities of the institutional "ASG" group.

→ Link to the technical note on the [restructuring of the working groups](#)

The session continued with reports from the coordinating Regions of the working groups on their activities during 2016-2017.

Juan José Sota Verdi3n, Regional Councillor for the economy, housing and employment, Cantabria, reported on the activities of the “Transport” working group, which had met twice since June 2016. The group advocates:

- allocating the remaining 10% of the CEF budget as a priority to projects which connect the peripheries to the core network;
- improving synergies between the policy for the Motorways of the Sea and other European policies such as innovation or maritime transport;
- reviewing the map of the core network to include ports which are not at present a priority for CEF funding;
- redrawing the Atlantic corridor;
- incorporating the principle of territorial cohesion into the implementation of the Sulphur Directive.

Cantabria wishes to continue as coordinating region for this group in 2017. In this context, **Juan Jos3 Sota Verdi3n** presented the group’s activities for 2017 (link to the ["Transport" Group's presentation](#)).

Laurence Harribey, Regional Councillor with responsibility for European affairs at Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region, reported on the activities of the “Innovation” working group. The group intends to develop projects that will demonstrate in a concrete way the added value of the Atlantic Strategy for regional development. The project “A Blue Master for a Blue Career”, led by La Rochelle University, is one such initiative. The best practice and outcomes could be capitalised on and reproduced in other geographical areas as well as in other sectors of the blue economy. **Laurence Harribey** welcomed the new hub-based organisation of the working groups, which would help to achieve this aim. Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region wishes to continue as coordinating region for this group in 2017. She plans to draw up a comprehensive inventory of blue training programmes and help to build a model project on innovation and marine mineral resources.

Melania 3lvarez Garc3a, Director General for Participatory Citizenship, Asturias Region, reported on the activities of the “Tourism and Culture” working group. Although the Region has been less active in the group than in the previous year, they would like to continue as coordinating region for this group in 2017. The aims of the group are to raise the profile of the Atlantic Arc as a tourist destination and to build a joint tourism and culture strategy focusing on the marketing of tourism products.

The “Renewable Marine Energies” group was not represented. However, Brittany, which has coordinated the group for the last two years, has said it would like to see another Atlantic Arc Commission region take over the coordination. **Mikel Anton Zarragoitia**, Director of European Affairs for the Basque Government, said that the Basque Country would be happy to do this, and the proposal was endorsed by the General Assembly for 2017.

Speaking for the “Fisheries” group, **Christophe Priou**, Vice-President for fisheries, the sea and the coast at Pays de la Loire Region, recalled that the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) had been a key topic in the discussions between Bruno Retailleau and Commissioner Vella. He said that Pays de la Loire Region would like to continue as coordinating region for this group. He added that the new hub-based organisation would mean that the group could devote its efforts to blue training and supporting new generations of fishers. Lastly he recalled the issues that were key priorities for the group, which had held its most recent meeting on 1 May 2017 in Sables d’Olonne:

- tensions between the national and regional levels in the implementation of the EMFF;
- cooperation with the Baltic Sea Commission on multi-year and multi-species planning in relation to quotas;
- the call for a two-year moratorium on the discard ban and the monitoring of the Val P3che processing plant on exploiting discards;
- the renewal of the Atlantic fishing fleet;

- the consequences of Brexit on the fisheries policy.

The Basque government, represented by **Mikel Anton Zarragoitia**, Director of European Affairs, reported on the activities of the Transatlantic Cooperation Task Force. A paper summarising the links between the Regions of the Atlantic Arc Commission and the regions of the American continent was prepared in June 2016. The Task Force plans to promote and consolidate institutional links, giving priority to the countries of Latin America with a view to seeking funding for projects. Brexit and the Free Trade agreement with Canada offer windows of opportunity.

Pauline Caumont closed this session with a report on the work of the “Atlantic Strategy” group, which has met five times, in parallel with the institutional “ASG” groups. The group wishes to work in closer coordination with the Transatlantic Cooperation Task Force. **Pauline Caumont** proposed for example to invite Sigi Gruber, Head of Unit at DG RESEARCH in charge of maritime issues, for a debate on the Galway Statement with the Transatlantic Cooperation Task Force. She also planned to work with her on seeking funding from the international strand of the Atlantic Strategy.

Sébastien Pilard, representing the President of the Atlantic Arc Commission, concluded the session and congratulated the groups on their work.

IV. SESSION 3 – PRESENTATION OF THE TECHNICAL AND POLITICAL DOCUMENTS OF THE ATLANTIC ARC COMMISSION

Pauline Caumont presented the [technical note](#) on the consequences of Brexit for the Atlantic Arc Regions. This summarises the currently available data and analyses of the consequences of Brexit in those policy areas that are of interest to the regions. In addition to the consequences on the EU budget and on the British regions’ access to European structural funds, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom could also weaken cooperation between the Atlantic regions in a number of areas: maritime spatial planning and management, renewable marine energies, the Trans-European Transport Network, research and training, and access by European fishing fleets to British waters. The main recommendation arising from this analysis is that the Atlantic Strategy should be used as the framework for relations with the United Kingdom. **Bruno Retailleau** added that the Brexit Task Force should help to make the negotiations more transparent.

José Jouneau, Chair of the Pays de la Loire Regional Fisheries Committee, emphasised the importance for fishers from this region, and from Aquitaine and Spain, of maintaining access to British waters.

Alfonso Garrido, speaking on behalf of the Junta da Andalucía, evoked his Region’s analysis of the impact of Brexit on British tourism in the Region, as well as the special nature of its border with Gibraltar. 21% of people employed in Gibraltar are Spanish.

Eleni Marianou spoke about the CPMR’s work on the future of Europe. She wished to initiate cooperation with the British regions. CPMR President Vasco Cordeiro had written to a large number of socio-economic players and a number of academics/researchers with a view to initiating a reflection on the European project. **Eleni Marianou** invited the Atlantic regions to take part in this initiative. Michel Barnier has been invited to speak at the next CPMR General Assembly.

Bruno Retailleau asked that all the CESER (regional Economic & Social Committees) also take part in this analysis of the potential impacts of Brexit in the Atlantic Arc regions.

Reacting, **Benoit Cailleau**, on behalf of the Atlantic regional CESER, said that a questionnaire had been sent out to the members of the CESER. The responses were expected at the end of March, and he planned to publish the analysis in the summer.

Michael O’Brien, on behalf of Northern and Western Regional Assembly, hoped to be able to take part in seminars on the future of Europe and invited CPMR to come to Ireland in this context.

Bruno Retailleau thanked the secretariat for this note. He reiterated the idea of a meeting with Michel Barnier, in Brussels or in Paris, before the end of the year.

Pauline Caumont, Executive Secretary of the Atlantic Arc Commission, presented the [Final Declaration](#) of the Atlantic Arc Commission’s 2017 General Assembly, which had been discussed by the Bureau the previous day. She said that final declarations were a recently-introduced exercise that had proved to

be quite effective. They give the Regions and the Secretariat of the Atlantic Arc Commission a common roadmap.

She summarised the messages for each selected theme. She then presented the amendments which had been discussed by the Political Bureau: an amendment submitted by Asturias underlining the importance of the cohesion policy and an amendment submitted by Galicia proposing the setting-up of a Brexit Task Force. Lastly Ireland highlighted the cross-border issues relating to the border between the Regions of the Atlantic Arc Commission and the United Kingdom.

José Jouneau, President of the COREPEM (Pays de la Loire regional fisheries and aquaculture committee), supported the reference to multi-year management of fish stocks. In his view this should be spread over a minimum of three years and be multi-species. He emphasised that a moratorium on the discard ban was essential for the sector.

The amendment to point 25 (Transport) was approved. The wording was changed from “the most remote Regions of these corridors” to “the Regions which are not situated on these Corridors”.

The amendments were approved one by one and the document was then put to the vote. **The Final Declaration “Les Sables d’Olonne 2017” was unanimously approved by the General Assembly of the Atlantic Arc Commission.**

FRIDAY 3 MARCH 2017

Sébastien Pilard opened the debates, saying maritime training programmes were important for the blue economy in the context of both traditional activities and the sectors of the future. He emphasised the commitment and involvement of Pays de la Loire Region in this area. The marine and maritime world was exciting, highly international and innovative, and young people need to re-engage with it.

ROUND TABLE – Future generations looking for innovation in the blue economy

Eleni Marianou introduced CPMR and the different speakers.

Estelle Graveleau and Benjamin Dutreux, from “Team Vendée”, presented their project. The association works in collaboration with companies to provide young people in the Vendée area, and especially students from the Lycée Tabarly, with advice and guidance on their future career in yacht racing. They aim to raise the awareness of young people and their parents about the employment opportunities in the maritime sector.

Laurence Harribey reminded the audience that the blue economy would represent 7 million jobs in Europe in 2020, in a wide variety of sectors. She described the work done by Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region and La Rochelle University to create a master’s degree in applied blue biotechnologies, a resolutely European programme leading to a professional qualification.

Stéphanie Bordenave-Juchereau, teacher and researcher at La Rochelle University, described the master programme in greater detail. It is an alternance training scheme, which caters to the needs of the labour market. It will start in September 2017 in La Rochelle and will include a “Winter School” in November 2017. The teaching will be in English and it will be possible to study a third foreign language from scratch. The idea is to reproduce this master programme in the European partner universities.

Cristelle Céleste, Socio-industrial Coordinator for “Éoliennes en mer Ile d’Yeu-Noirmoutier”, presented this company’s project to develop and operate an offshore wind farm to be installed between Ile d’Yeu and Noirmoutier (Pays de la Loire-France). The project requires the services of a range of professions: suppliers, jurists, financiers, engineers, communications specialists, etc. The construction and installation phases also call upon traditional professions which need to adapt to the challenges of working at sea. The company has built up links with universities in the region. She said that English was often used as a working language in the context of exchange of experience with other European players in the offshore wind sector.

Sofia Ribeiro MEP thanked the speakers for their presentations. She was concerned about the rate of unemployment of young people in Europe and said that the maritime sector represented job opportunities. The European Parliament’s job is to see that training programmes closely match the needs of the private sector, and it does this through economic and budgetary policies and through the harmonisation of qualifications across Europe. However, the EU does not have direct competence for

education. She underlined the high quality of the work being done by the secondary schools offering vocational training to cater to the needs of the job market. She also gave some examples of innovative projects being developed in the maritime sector in Portugal. She was happy to answer any questions from the students present about her work at the European Parliament.

Christos Economou, Head of Unit in charge of sea basin strategies at the European Commission, thanked the speakers for their presentations. The projects showed that the EU was not remote from the interests of young people. Student mobility was an important topic for the European institutions. Training programmes needed to be adapted to keep pace with technological innovations. After recalling the role played by DG MARE in relation to the blue economy and the sea basin strategy, he congratulated the Atlantic stakeholders involved in the three calls for projects: Blue Career, Blue Labs, Blue Tech.

Philippe Prudor, Head of the Lycée Éric Tabarly, thanked Sofia Ribeiro for highlighting the importance of vocational education and training. He pointed out that the marine maintenance programme taught at the Lycée was adapted to the needs of companies such as that of Christelle Céleste. In terms of future prospects, the school also hoped to develop its provision of training programmes by becoming part of the national initiative “a campus of professions and qualifications for the blue economy”.

Eleni Marianou, speaking as Secretary General of CPMR, explained the “Vasco da Gama” initiative, which is funded by DG MOVE. Under this project, CPMR has promoted youth mobility in blue training in maritime areas across the whole of Europe and is today working to extend the project by using ESF funding to set up grants for internships for young graduates from maritime training programmes.

Olivier Brunet, from Bretagne-Loire University, congratulated the different speakers for the European-level maritime training programmes.

Pauline Caumont underlined the importance of the EU’s indirect action on maritime training and the vital role played by the regions which have competence for secondary level and vocational education and training as well as apprenticeships. She asked the European Commission for clarification on the “New Skills Agenda for Europe” initiative.

Christos Economou explained that this was a Communication from the Commission last July, which sought to understand the skills needs of the private sector and to adapt and promote future training programmes. Five high growth potential sectors, including maritime industries, had been selected to implement this roadmap. There are three phases: inventory, needs analysis, and implementation of recommendations in the regions. The analysis will receive funding from the ERASMUS+ programme.

Sofia Ribeiro emphasised that international mobility was vital not only in terms of the employability of young people but also in terms of upgrading teachers’ skills. The EU works to reduce obstacles to mobility. One important aspect is the recognition of formal and non-formal skills training at European level. Over and above the vocational dimension, she pointed out that the Erasmus programme had enabled the birth of a million babies to couples who met during their period abroad.

ROUND TABLE - Innovation as a tool to protect and secure the Atlantic environment?

Following a brief introduction to the second round table, **Eleni Marianou** gave the floor to the team from Ant-Artic-Lab, made up of former students of the Lycée Eric Tabarly.

Marion Koch presented the “ANT-ARCTIC-LAB” extreme sailing project. This is a project to design a yacht which can resist all the Atlantic climates, from the Arctic to the Equator, and which will be used for a single-handed sailing challenge. It has been built using innovative, resistant and environmentally-friendly materials. The challenge will provide an opportunity to raise public awareness about the state of the environment in the Atlantic.

Patrick Deixonne, Leader of the “7th continent” expedition, yachtsman and member of the Society of French Explorers presented the work of his association. He campaigns to bring the ocean to the forefront of the debates on climate change. The ocean is a rare and valuable resource which is becoming increasingly contaminated by plastic waste. In addition to the unsightly visual impact, this pollution causes the death of 100,000 marine mammals, encourages the development of invasive species and the transport of pollutants and viruses, not to mention the consequences on the food

chain. To reduce the impact of plastic waste, the association encourages local authorities to adopt recycling solutions.

Bruno Retailleau thanked Ant-Arctic-Lab and Patrick Deixonne. He recalled the vital importance of combating and adapting to climate change in Vendée. Nine people had died as a result of the Xynthia windstorm in 2010. The level of the Atlantic Ocean had risen by 20 cm between the 20th and the 21st centuries. The regions were particularly badly affected by coastal erosion. In this context, he had visited the Netherlands to gain inspiration from their adaptation practices. Technical innovations had proved to be economically feasible, for example the electrical substations built by the cruise liner company STX or the offshore floating wind turbines off the coast at Le Croisic.

Sofia Ribeiro said she had found all the projects fascinating, and thanked the panellists for their excellent presentations. These projects correspond perfectly to the spirit of the EU's Europe 2020 Strategy for a smart, sustainable and inclusive European economy. She talked about a similar Portuguese project aiming to sail to the North Pole. She would be delighted to welcome Ant-Arctic-Lab to the Azores. She also stressed that innovation was taking place not only in the new maritime sectors but also in traditional sectors such as fishing.

Reacting to the presentations, **Christos Economou** clarified the work of the Commission on the circular economy, which has a high growth potential; it is estimated that it will create 2 million jobs between now and 2030. The EU has shared competence for the environment. Concerning the Atlantic, the EU works to protect the ocean through the Atlantic Strategy and through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). In 2017, further calls for projects will be published on coastal observation and marine renewable energies. Mr Economou also mentioned a project entitled [Guardians of the Sea](#) which aims to mobilise fishermen to collect marine litter.

In answer to a question from Philippe Prudor concerning the European institutions' action on the environment compared to that of their neighbours, **Christos Economou** said that the EU went further than international obligations. In its guideline documents, the EU was committed to internationally promoting the governance of the oceans. It took part in global events such as [Our Oceans](#) and worked with international environmental stakeholders. **Sofia Ribeiro** also mentioned the free trade agreement with Canada, which had been approved by the European Parliament in February 2017. This was not simply an economic agreement but also enabled the EU to disseminate its environmental standards.

Christophe Priou recalled that Pays de la Loire Region had been hit by large-scale ecological disasters. A transition to sustainable practices sometimes took a long time to achieve. The procedures of the International Maritime Organisation were long and the recommendations sometimes difficult to implement.

Patrick Deixonne said that sustainable development training programmes were an initial solution in working toward a change in consumer behaviour.

Christos Economou pointed out that since the "Erika" European legislative package, no similar accident had been recorded. Environmental legislation was therefore fundamental in a transition to sustainable practices. He agreed that the regional level should be taken into account in the legislative process in order to anticipate problems at the implementation stage.

CLOSING REMARKS

Bruno Retailleau closed the 2017 General Assembly of the Atlantic Arc Commission. He welcomed the new form of the debates, with the involvement of young people, and hoped that this initiative would be continued. He welcomed the [Final Declaration](#) which had been unanimously adopted by the member Regions. He reiterated his commitment to developing maritime training and his desire to apply the Vasco da Gama in the Atlantic. He thanked the secretariat for the technical note on Brexit and proposed that a meeting be organised with Michel Barnier before the end of 2017 in the context of the future of the European project. Addressing the young people present, he underlined the need for the European level, which he said could be more effective in addressing certain issues. The multilateralism in international relations which had grown out of the two world wars was in the process of disintegrating. They were facing an increasingly dangerous world. But Europe allowed us to be united. It was not just a single market; it was also a common culture and common values. The Atlantic Arc Commission was a staunch advocate. He said the audience could count on the Atlantic Arc

Commission to defend local interests on the environment, training and the future of the European project at the European level. He hoped in this respect to see an Environmental Charter for the Atlantic, along the lines of the Bologna Charter for the Mediterranean.