



Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly

14/15 June 2018 - Comillas (Cantabria-ES)

Meeting Minutes

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Juan José Sota greeted the participants and welcomed them to Comillas. **Javier León Serrano**, Vice Rector in charge of Research and Knowledge Transfer at the University of Cantabria, also thanked the participants for coming to Cantabria.

Eleni Marianou, Secretary General of the CPMR, reminded the Atlantic Arc Commission members of all the tools at their disposal to bring about change in the regions for the well-being of their citizens.

Sébastien Pilard thanked Cantabria and apologised for the absence of the President of Pays de la Loire Region, who had been detained by a last-minute ministerial visit. He recalled his Region's commitment to the Atlantic Arc Commission's work and thanked the Political Bureau once more for renewing its trust in the presidency for the next term of office. He evoked the coming years which would be a time of transition, with a new European Commission, a new Parliament and Brexit. He called for dialogue and stronger actions, through the Atlantic Arc Commission's working groups and projects.

Pauline Caumont covered some statutory points. The agenda was validated, as were the [minutes of the Atlantic Arc Commission's plenary meeting in Helsinki](#) (October 2017).

She presented the [activity report](#) describing work undertaken since the General Assembly in Les Sables d'Olonne (March 2017) and the work programme for 2018/2019. She highlighted the Atlantic Arc Commission's key areas of action. Political lobbying, backed strongly by the Presidency, had been carried out on Brexit ([Technical note on the consequences of Brexit for Atlantic Arc Regions](#)) and on fisheries ([Declaration by the Atlantic Arc Commission on the landing obligation in the CFP](#)). **Pauline Caumont** recalled the three cooperation projects in which the Atlantic Arc Commission is involved: BBMBC (<https://www.bbmhc.eu/>), with the support of Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region through the Innovation working group; the SAFER project and the CleanAtlantic project (<http://www.cleanatlantic.eu/>). She concluded by mentioning how the profile of the Atlantic Arc Commission's work is being raised through [Twitter](#), the CPMR Newsletter and the [Atlantic Arc Commission website](#).

Finally, **Pauline Caumont** announced the budget outlook for the Atlantic Arc Commission based on the documents sent to members. The three main points to note are to encourage the involvement of regions that may have difficulties to travel, to keep up the momentum linked to the different projects and to continue looking at all possibilities to expand the membership base.

ATLANTIC ARC COMMISSION WORKING GROUPS – ACTIVITY REPORTS AND ELECTION OF NEW LEAD REGIONS FOR THE GROUPS

Ludovic Lareynie described the work of the **Innovation** Group (see [presentation](#)), particularly with the development of the BBMBC project. Future work would be based on three guidelines: continuing the [BBMBC](#) master, disseminating good practices in terms of innovation on the Atlantic coast, and developing a new project on innovation topics, for example an "Ocean Pack" to create a module and make an inventory of blue growth professions. Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region was reappointed to lead this working group.

Christos Economou, DG MARE, welcomed the developments and the continuation of the project. He was delighted to see that this project is being transformed in practice and scaled up on a Europe-wide level.

Eloísa Susaeta Azcoitia, for the Basque Country, took stock of the work led by the **Marine Renewable Energy** Working Group. She recalled the various meetings of the group and the technical visit organised with the North Sea Commission in Amsterdam in November 2017. She mentioned the role of marine renewable energies in the Atlantic Regions' economy and the possible synergies. The Basque Country was reappointed to lead this working group.

Pauline Caumont briefed members on the **Atlantic Tourism and Culture** Working Group. In the absence of a candidate to lead this group, she proposed to put it on standby until further notice.

Vanessa Charbonneau presented the **Fisheries and Aquaculture** Working Group and reported on the activities and the [Declaration by the Atlantic Arc Commission on the landing obligation in the CFP](#). She set out the priorities for the future which are to defend a favourable EU framework and a European fisheries policy adapted to the realities of the Atlantic Regions. Pays de la Loire Region was reappointed to lead this working group.

José Manuel San Emeterio, SAFER Project Manager, gave a [presentation](#) on the project, which is related to two of the Atlantic Arc Commission's priorities: fisheries and innovation. **José Manuel San Emeterio** recalled which partners are involved and is relying on the commitment of the Atlantic Arc Commission Regions.

Two nominations (País Vasco and Cantabria) were put forward for the **Transport** working group. Cantabria will take forward the work in 2018-2019, and the Basque Country will take over in 2019-2020. **Montserrat García**, for Cantabria, specified that Cantabria's guidelines for this working group would be developed in session 4 on transport. **Eloísa Susaeta Azcoitia**, for the Basque Country, presented the main lines of the Basque Country's proposal: to develop actions to strengthen the Atlantic Arc in the European transport network, to conduct a policy watch on European developments in transport issues (air transport, etc.), to prepare replies to European consultations on transport, to present projects of interest to the Regions, and to develop technical work on the Atlantic Arc. She pointed out that the Basque Government has specialised staff on transport who can provide their expertise on this subject.

Jesús Gamallo presented the work of the **Brexit** Task Force and recalled his Region's commitment in this subject area. **Ángel L. Sánchez Muñoz**, Secretary General for External Action of Andalusia, welcomed the work on Brexit and Fisheries, two topics that were of special interest to his Region. Galicia was reappointed to lead this Task Force.

Sébastien Pilard concluded by summing up the guidelines of the different working groups and he welcomed their active engagement.

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF CANTABRIA

Miguel Ángel Revilla, President of the Cantabrian Government, greeted the participants and declared that he was delighted for them to be in his Region of Cantabria. He recalled that Cantabria was committed to defending the Cantabrian Sea and stressed the importance of environmental protection in response to climate challenges. Referring to the Marquis of Comillas and his influence on this small Cantabrian town, he stated that his Region, and Comillas in particular, was the first place in Spain to provide electricity to the population. Hence the importance of energy-related topics for Cantabria. Although the Region has some major assets - international airport, large seaport, universities, thriving industries, etc. – it still lacks connectivity with Madrid via a rail link. He also stressed the importance of tackling desertification in rural areas. Finally, **Miguel Ángel Revilla** concluded by stating his Region's engagement and commitment to the European project.

FUTURE INTERREG PROGRAMMES FOR THE ATLANTIC STRATEGY

Introduction by **Juan José Sota Verdión**, Regional Minister for Economy, Development and Employment of the Cantabrian Government. He urged the Atlantic Arc Commission to contribute to the European Commission's Communication of 29 May on European Territorial Cooperation (ETC). He particularly stressed the need to strengthen maritime cooperation. The Atlantic Strategy fails to meet all expectations, the main problem being the lack of direct funding. Macro-Regional Strategies are policy instruments, with broader objectives than for ETC.

Pauline Caumont moderated the session and introduced the speakers by opening the discussion on the following three topics:

- 1) How to improve the link between the Atlantic strategy and Interreg programmes in the area?
- 2) What mechanisms for cooperation with the United Kingdom?
- 3) And how to simplify Interreg programmes?

Sandra Tavares da Silva, Executive Member of the Atlantic Area Programme Managing Authority (Norte Region -PT), introduced her remarks by recalling the key elements of the Interreg Atlantic Area programme: promoting economic and social cohesion and supporting the Atlantic coastal regions. She highlighted the long tradition of cooperation between the Regions since the ATLANTIS pilot project, which had paved the way for the Interreg Atlantic Area programme. Since then, the programme has achieved great results despite a small budget (€140 million in ERDF funding). For the future, she underlined some important ways forward: better connection with the public, improving the governance of the programme, and more links with the Atlantic Maritime Strategy.

In his [presentation](#), **Juan Llanes**, Executive Member of the SUDOE programme Managing Authority (Cantabrian Government -ES), thanked the Atlantic Arc Commission for the invitation and briefly introduced the SUDOE programme. He underlined the stability of the management structures that has been a key factor, as well as the good cooperation dynamics. The programme will launch a 4th call before the end of the programming period on capitalisation projects.

Fernando de la Peña López, for the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, put forward the point of view of the Atlantic Strategy Group (ASG). He thanked the Atlantic Arc Commission for its support, and for its active participation in the ASG group. The action plan for the Atlantic strategy, introduced in 2013, is currently being revised. On the issue of funding, he said more direct funding could have had more impact. He thanked DG Mare and DG Regio for the support they have given to the strategy. He called for the creation of an exclusive fund to finance the Atlantic strategy, or the introduction of bonuses in existing programmes. He called on the Commission to find solutions.

Pauline Caumont thanked the speakers and opened a first round of debate:

Claire Le Tertre, from Brittany Region, supported Fernando de la Peña's request for a bigger budget. In the context of the Interreg Atlantic Area programme, there is a clear lack of funding: 426 applications were submitted under the programme's first call, and very few could be funded. More resources are needed to support this strategy. She also proposed to prepare a guide presenting all the funding sources available to actors within the framework of the strategy.

Mikel Anton, from the Basque Country, also endorsed the view expressed by Brittany and the Spanish Government representative: an Atlantic Strategy fund would be very useful. Another option would be to have dedicated funding lines in European programmes. All Regions of the Atlantic Arc Commission share this view.

Eleni Marianou, Secretary General of the CPMR, noted, however, that it seemed difficult to set up a dedicated fund as the new regulations had already been published. She highlighted the possibility of introducing incentives such as co-financing bonuses. Allowing projects to finance infrastructures would also be a positive initiative, or an investment platform linked to the strategy. Programmes need to be better connected to the strategy so that it is not just an empty shell.

Elina Hakonen-Meddings, Deputy Head of Unit - DG Regio of the European Commission, said she was pleased to be among big supporters of cohesion policy and European territorial cooperation, especially the Atlantic Area programme. In the face of huge challenges, cooperation must be the answer. With regard to the next programming period, a slight increase in the general EU budget is foreseen with a greater emphasis on research and development, as well as on young people.

👉 Regarding [cohesion policy](#), the budget proposal amounts to 330 billion euros, which represents a decrease of about 10% compared to the current period. It remains targeted at all regions, with a special focus on the poorest regions.

👉 Regarding [simplification](#), radical proposals have been made. The regulations are shorter, and 7 funds share a common regulation. The appointment of the managing authorities will also be simplified. There will no longer be an annual report for annual programmes so as to ease administrative procedures. In terms of payment, the Commission recommends the simplified payment option depending on the results of the projects. The thematic objectives have been reduced from 11 to 5.

- ✦ Regarding cooperation policy: the budget remains the same, at 9.5 billion euros in current prices. Cross-border programmes will focus on land borders. The biggest share of the budget will go towards this. The Commission proposes to strengthen maritime cooperation by concentrating it on the sea basins: 6 sea areas will have their own programmes: Arctic, Atlantic, North Sea, Baltic, Mediterranean and Adriatic & Ionian. She stressed that maritime cooperation will be strengthened in the next period. The goal is to avoid fragmentation and overlapping of programmes. Transnational programmes will be aligned with macro-regional and maritime strategies. There will be a special component for the Outermost Regions, as well as for Smart Specialisation to facilitate S3 based interregional cooperation.
- ✦ These proposals are being discussed in the Council between the Member States and in the European Parliament. The Commission hopes for approval before the May 2019 elections.

Christos Economou, Head of Unit in charge of Sea Basin Strategies - DG Mare of the European Commission, stated that he was pleased to be among the members of the Atlantic Arc Commission, a very active community of Regions that puts forward inspiring ideas. From DG Mare's side, the action plan for the Atlantic strategy is currently being reviewed. The goal is to "think better" and "do better" with the strategy. He stressed the need to recognise the advantage the strategy has for stakeholder networking, which has resulted in many projects. To quote examples, in the "Blue Calls" launched by DG Mare, 8 of the 13 selected projects involve Atlantic partners. These are positive signs.

- ✦ With regard to the mid-term review, DG Mare believes that the content of the action plan is too general and needs to be clarified. Regions need to help identify where the needs are and in which sectors, so as to better direct funding from the different programmes. National workshops are being prepared, and the CPMR is actively assisting in their organisation. Finally, he underlined that it would be impossible in regulatory terms to create a new fund for the Strategy, but there remains the possibility of influencing future funds.
- ✦ Regarding governance, there is a difference between macro-regions and maritime strategy. The Commission implements requests from the States, and the States have called for a maritime strategy. This could change if the States so wish.
- ✦ Regarding the assistance mechanism of the strategy, a third phase will be in place in July. A booklet presenting the different funds available to all stakeholders is a good idea; DG Mare can ask the assistance mechanism for this.
- ✦ He concluded by saying that DG Mare is very committed to increasing the budgets available for the Atlantic Strategy. They wish to have a better action plan, and Mr Economou shares our efforts towards achieving this.

Pauline Caumont thanked the speakers for their comprehensive and very informative contributions. She underlined what had been said about the Atlantic Arc Commission. It is indeed a forum of very active Regions which passes on information to the European level on what is really expected in the Regions in order to align the funds with the needs on the ground. She opened a second round of debate.

Ludovic Lareynie, from Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region, asked for details about the European cross-border mechanism. This seems like a real breakthrough, but he wondered what concrete applications this could have. Will it be possible to finance infrastructure?

Elina Hakonen-Meddings replied that cross-border maritime cooperation could be a sub-programme with a separate Joint Technical Secretariat, as part of a transnational programme.

Eleni Marianou wondered about the reason for moving cross-border maritime cooperation to transnational programmes. How can we be sure that current cooperation activities will continue?

Elina Hakonen-Meddings stated that this is the conclusion from studies and programme evaluations. Some programmes have very similar priorities, and the European Commission wants to prevent giving project leaders the opportunity to submit the same project under different programmes. Given the budget cuts related to Brexit, DG Regio was considering how to strengthen the impact of ETC. Based on different studies, they felt it was logical to strengthen maritime cooperation at European sea basins level. The regulation still gives the possibility to set up "sub-programmes" with separate steering committees. The Commission's intention is not to stop cross-border maritime cooperation, but to give it a more strategic dimension.

Ángel L. Sánchez Muñoz, Secretary General for External Action of Andalusia, supported internal and external maritime territorial cooperation. Maritime cooperation is more complicated because it depends on private operators. Andalusia has cooperation activities with Morocco which has had excellent results for Spain and Europe. This cooperation is necessary and must continue.

Elina Hakonen-Meddings indicated that, for the next period, it is planned to strengthen the external dimension of cooperation with neighbouring countries and EU candidate countries.

To conclude, **Sébastien Pilard** warmly thanked all the speakers for these in-depth debates which had been very inspiring. Many announced changes are of interest to the Regions, and the Atlantic Arc Commission would be monitoring developments very closely.

TOWARDS GREATER ACCESSIBILITY FOR ATLANTIC REGIONS IN THE POST-2020 PERIOD

Introduction and presentation of the report from the Atlantic Arc Commission's Transport Working Group:

Juan José Sota Verdion, Regional Minister for the Economy, Finance and Employment of the Cantabrian Government, recalled the importance that the port of Santander represents in Cantabria's GDP and for the region's development. Its connection with the rail network to the south and east is fundamental.

Francisco Martín Gallego, Regional Minister for Innovation, Industry and Trade of the Cantabrian Government, recalled that the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) has so far focused on financing corridors up to 95% of its budget. Cantabria has campaigned within the CPMR for a better geographical distribution of European funding.

- [See Working Papers from the CPMR and Atlantic Arc Commission](#)

He welcomed the expansion of the Atlantic and Mediterranean Corridor to the benefit of the Atlantic Regions, as well as the new opportunity to finance a list of cross-border transport projects. He hoped that the Atlantic Arc Commission would continue to defend the extension of the Cantabrian railway to the three main Basque towns.

He presented the next steps for the group, which were a summary of the proposals from the Basque Country and Cantabria, which were co-chairing the group:

- **Highlight the value of the motorways of the sea** as a means of connecting Ireland to the continent in the context of Brexit, and also as a tool for energy transition (LNG project, MedAtlantic Ecobonus). Maritime transport does not compete with land transport but rather complements it;
- **Develop an alternative map of corridors;**
- **Achieve a common stance** between Atlantic Regions that are part of the core network and those that are part of the comprehensive network;
- **Uphold the principle of territorial cohesion** (Article 4 of the CEF);
- **Work on a policy statement** on TEN-T and the CEF II;
- **Plan a meeting between the transport leaders** from the Atlantic Regions in Brussels or in Cantabria, a "Forum of Atlantic Regions for the Future of European Transport Policy" with a view to signing a joint statement;
- **Organise political meetings** to present this statement to the institutions.

The ensuing discussion was moderated by **Patrick Anvroin**, CPMR Director in charge of Transport, who made a [presentation](#) on the challenges of the European Commission's proposal for a regulation on the CEF and the next stages in the CPMR's lobbying action.

Isabelle Maes, Advisor to the Atlantic Corridor Coordinator at DG Move of the European Commission (*remote intervention*) presented the main details of the future of EU transport policy:

- 👉 **Regarding the budget:** the military mobility fund is fully part of the CEF II. Taking into account the cohesion fund, the CEF II budget is increased by 14%, which is very positive in the context of Brexit. The Military Mobility Fund will contribute towards developing infrastructure and increase the technical performance of the network for the benefit of the military and civilians.

- ✎ **Regarding the CEF regulation:** there is a general envelope and a cohesion envelope that will work differently. 70% of the cohesion envelope will be spent up to 2023, respecting the national shares. After this date, the countries eligible for the Cohesion Fund will compete for the unspent envelope and the remaining 30%. The Cohesion Fund will allow co-financing of 85% for cross-border projects and 70% for the rest. For the general envelope, projects involving a cross-border connection and/or connection with an outermost region will be co-financed at 50%; the others at 30%. The same goes for the military mobility fund. Motorways of the sea are not considered as cross-border items.
- ✎ **Annex 1 of the CEF:** the corridors have been extended and include some amendments put forward by the CPMR. Amendments that were rejected were done so for legal reasons because they included parts of the comprehensive network, which are not eligible. For budgetary reasons, the European Commission has also limited itself to increasing the size (in kilometres) of the corridor network by only 15%.

Ben Breen, Economist - IMDO (Irish Maritime Development Office), gave a [presentation](#) on the Irish context in relation to transport. Irish ports are the subject of a specific policy at national level (2013). Three ports have concentrated investments: Dublin, Cork and Shannon. Currently Irish ports are facing several challenges:

- The dependency on maritime transport of Irish imports;
- Brexit and the slowing down of customs procedures with the United Kingdom;
- Brexit and changes in the routes taken by goods.

In recent years, Irish ports have been able to adapt by developing new connections with Zeebrugge, Rotterdam and Santander. This will be taken further to integrate Irish ports and European ports.

Felipe Piña, Director General of Transport and Communication of the Cantabrian Government, detailed in her [presentation](#) the five guidelines of the regional transport strategy: bringing citizens socially closer together and helping them open up to Europe; developing the information society to improve the quality of the transport service; promoting sustainable mobility; developing public transport (land, air and sea); and developing intermodality. The issue of accessibility is important for Cantabria, whose population is concentrated mainly on the coast, while rural areas are becoming depopulated. It should also be noted that in summer, the population quadruples on the coast.

✎ Debate with participants

Pauline Caumont asked Isabelle Maes about the timeline for adopting the CEF II. In response, **Isabelle Maes** said that DG Move does not know but would like the process to be finalised in mid-2019 before the European Parliament elections. The first call for projects under the CEF II will be in 2021. The CEF II will have no impact on the current programming period.

Pauline Caumont asked Ben Breen why a Cork-Santander line had been opened. **Ben Breen** replied that Brexit was not the only reason. He recalled that a route can create new opportunities for businesses and thus consolidate its viability in the longer term. He stressed the importance of connections between ports and the hinterland. This is especially the case to ensure the sustainability of the Cork-Santander route.

Michel Caniaux, project leader of **Via Atlantica**, talked about his association's work to link the Atlantic coastline to the Lyon-Turin line. He proposed that Atlantic Arc Commission regions support this project as part of the TEN-T review. **Sébastien Pilard** and **Pauline Caumont** recalled that the first step was the revision of the CEF and the connection of each Atlantic region to the corridors. Ultimately, the Lyon-Turin line could be supported if the Atlantic Arc Commission Regions requested the secretariat to do so.

APPROVAL OF THE ATLANTIC ARC COMMISSION'S POLITICAL DECLARATION AND NEXT STEPS

Pauline Caumont presented the [2018 Political Declaration](#) and recalled the role of this document in our discussions with the EU institutions. She presented the amendments to be discussed following the debates at the Political Bureau meeting the day before.

She concluded by reminding members of the important upcoming dates for the Atlantic Arc Commission:

- 18 October 2018: meeting of the Atlantic Arc Commission in the framework of the CPMR General Assembly (Madeira-Portugal)
- Spring 2019: Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly (Date and place to be confirmed)

Sébastien Pilard closed the meeting by thanking the participants for their presence in Comillas. He thanked Cantabria for organising this General Assembly in a particularly impressive and pleasant setting. He also thanked the staff of the Atlantic Arc Commission and Cantabria who had made the organisation of this event possible.