Governance of Existing Macro-Regions and possible scenarios for the Atlantic

*To be discussed at the Atlantic Arc Commission Political Seminar on 1st March 2023*

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**Executive Summary**

The present document aims at supporting the Atlantic Arc Commission Regions in defining their preferences in terms of governance of a future Atlantic Macro-Region. This document puts in motion the political orientations proposed by President Iñigo Urkullu, President of the Atlantic Arc Commission (AAC), and voted by members at the Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly of San Sebastian on 24 and 25 May 2022, as well as the conclusions of the Political Steering Group organised on 13 September 2022. It follows the agreement of the Spanish Government to evaluate the possibility to create the Atlantic Macro-Region during its Presidency of the EU Council.

The first part develops the state of play on the role of regions in the governance of existing Macro-Region around two questions: (1) What are the concrete outputs for Regions of a Macro-Region; (2) What are the costs associated to the functioning of a Macro-region, from a region’s perspective. The second part focuses on different scenarios of multi-level governance that could be applied to the Atlantic area. The third part aims at drawing avenues of reflection for the post-2027 should the Atlantic Macro-Region be created.

The paper is based on data gathered from desk research, interviews and email exchanges with representatives of the Alpine and the Baltic Macro-Regions (see minutes of Veneto Region’s hearing). The Alpine Macro-Region presents an interesting governance setting centred around regional authorities, while the Baltic Macro-Region is the oldest existing Macro-Region which present a long-standing experience of cooperation around the Baltic Sea.

This technical paper will serve as a basis of discussion for the Atlantic Arc Commission political seminar organised on 1st March 2023, in Brussels, and for a political declaration to be voted at the Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly in Spring 2023.
1. Comparison between the Atlantic Maritime Strategy, the Alpine and Baltic Macro-Regions

- Macro-Regions work in favour of a joint vision of an area development

While both Macro-Regions and Sea-basin strategies aim at tackling common challenges characteristic of an area, the Macro-regions distinguish themselves from sea-basin strategies by their joint vision of territorial development, while Sea-basin strategies’ goal is to define a common maritime strategy of an area implementing at sea-basin level the rational of the EU Integrated Maritime Policy. In concrete terms, this difference implies that more room is made for territorial development priorities beyond maritime concerns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Atlantic Strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implements the EU Integrated Maritime Policy</td>
<td>Implements cohesion policy in the Alpine area</td>
<td>Implements cohesion policy in the Baltic area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has four maritime pillars: Ports as hub of the blue economy; Ocean literacy; Marine Renewable Energy and Healthy Ocean/Resilient coasts</td>
<td>EUSALP thematic policy areas are Economic Growth and Innovation; Mobility and Connectivity; Environment and Energy and Governance, including Institutional Capacity.</td>
<td>Although centred on the Baltic Sea, EUSBSR includes three key challenges: (1) saving the sea, (2) connecting the region and (3) increasing prosperity. Each objective relates to 14 of policy areas: Spatial Planning, Tourism, Transport, Energy, Bioeconomy, Culture, Education, Hazards, Health, Innovation, Nutri, Safe, Secure, Ship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does not cover other priorities of the regions’ interest such as tourism, mobility and connectivity, fisheries.</td>
<td>In 2022, EUSALP members agreed to: a) becoming a carbon neutral macro-region in the shortest possible time; b) expanding and strengthening circular economy in short supply chains; c) promoting a sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources, especially water; d) strengthening the sustainable, carbon neutral and emission free mobility, e) strengthening the region’s socio-economic prospect by investing in digital solutions and smart villages.</td>
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- Macro-Regions have a more structured multi-level governance

All the Macro-regions distinguish themselves from sea-basin strategies by their high-level political ownership embodied by the meeting of participating countries minister every year in the annual forum of the Macro-Region.

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<td>It gathers once a year at the Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Conference, chaired by Presidency of the Atlantic Strategy. High level participation had varied lately. On an ad hoc basis, the Minister or Secretary of State of the Country chairing the Strategy has introduced the meeting. More commonly the ASCP has gathered the Members State representatives at Director levels.</td>
<td>It holds a General Assembly which gathers high level representatives of participating states (minister or vice-ministers when chairing the strategy), Regions involved in the Strategy (presidents when chairing the strategy), Commissioner in charge of Cohesion and Urban Policy, and the Alpine Convention as observer. Detailed rules of procedure guide the work of the General Assembly</td>
<td>The Annual Forum 2021 of the Baltic Strategy was opened by Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and Prime Ministers of Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. The Secretary-General of the OECD participated.</td>
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</table>
It is more considered as a celebration event promoting initiatives of Atlantic Stakeholders. No Ministerial Declarations have been made so far. Decisions on the functioning of the Strategy are made in ASC meetings. Portugal, as new chair of the Atlantic Strategy in 2023 aims however at holding a ministerial meeting at the end of the year.

(1 country = 1 vote). In these meetings, members orient the future of the Strategy such as deciding on areas of cooperation to focus on, appoint Action Group coordinators, revise rules of procedure, etc. (see Decision paper, November 2022).

General Assembly has the possibility of organising ministerial meetings. Annually, the General Assembly can meet in an extended format, open to all relevant stakeholders (Annual Forum).

The Macro-Regions are very diverse in terms of governance arrangements but have the commonality to seek improvements in terms of **multi-level governance including regional authorities**.

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<td></td>
<td>Chaired by Directors of ministries from participating Member States on a rotating basis. Member States representatives are the only standing member with a right of vote at the Atlantic Strategy Group. Regions are only able to join if their member state invite them. No binding rule exists to involve regions. So far, only France allowed it. The AAC Secretariat is an associated member of the Atlantic Strategy Committee and participate as advisor in the different ASC consultations. No vote granted. The recent discussions on the terms of reference of the ASC have not enabled change in this respect.</td>
<td>Regions can co-chair the Strategy with Member States. The Italian presidency 2022 was held by the Autonomous Provinces of Bolzano/Bozen and Trento. Regions are full members of the Executive Board together with representatives of the States. The Board gather 3 times a year.</td>
<td>The National Coordinators’ group which is the core decision-making body is composed of Member States representatives. No formal role is given to CPMR Baltic Sea Commission although it acts as a facilitator and develops strategies to influence the development of EUSBSR (e.g. co-organisation of the EUSBSR Annual Forum between the CPMR BSC and the Federal Foreign Office in Germany in June 2017)</td>
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<td>Operational level</td>
<td>No region is a pillar coordinator. Regional stakeholders can be part of pillars task forces, on a voluntary basis. Designation of members of Pillars task force are at the discretion of pillar coordinators and Member States. The Secretariat function is ensured by the Assistance Mechanism composed of consultancy enterprises (PWC, Ecorys and AETS)</td>
<td>Pillars coordination can be shared by a duo of regions. They gather every 2/3 months. Their work is supported by INTERREG Alpine Space. The Alpine Macro-Region Secretariat is held by Sud-PACA Region with the support of a team composed of experts from different Alpine regions, financed by INTERREG Alpine Space and regional support.</td>
<td>A region can apply to be policy area coordinator (Oulo Region coordinator of PA tourism) fully supported by INTERREG Baltic Area. Turku and Hamburg Regions host the Baltic Strategy Point. With this positioning they aim at strengthening their cooperation with countries, regions, and cities in the Baltic Sea Region.</td>
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Other practices

EUSALP has a Political Priority “improving the governance of the area” allowing innovation in terms of multi-level governance mechanisms

EUSALP created the AlpGOV project financed by INTERREG to improve the governance of the strategy. It is led by Lombardy Region.

Macro-regions benefit from regular meetings with the other Macro-regions to reflect on improvements of governance in particular.

The Macro-Regions have managed to create consensus between different networks of the area on the direction to take to enhance the sustainable development of the area and have performed better in terms of stakeholder’s engagement. This was possible through an early engagement with existing cooperation structures in the area, but also a constant support to direct participation of civil society representatives in the governance of the Macro-Region.

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<td><strong>Political level</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Atlantic Strategy Committee involves as “associated members” some of the Atlantic associations: the Atlantic Arc Commission, Atlantic Cities, RTA-ATN the association of economic and social committees of the Atlantic. With HR changes experienced in some of these entities, participation has varied. No link with the Atlantic association of chamber of agriculture or the different Euroregions in the Atlantic area. Bilateral cooperations between Ireland-France on energy (dec 2022) or France and Spain (recent friendship declaration in Jan 2023) remain out of the scope of the Strategy.</td>
<td>EUSALP has been built upon a long tradition of cooperation in the Alps and on the existing preparatory work. The strategy benefit from the experience of a large number of cooperation structures already operating in the area: Arge-Alp, Alpine Convention, Alpe-Adria, Euregio, Cotrao, trilateral cooperation between Slovenia, NE-Italy and Austria and other ad hoc structures such as the ‘Zurich Group’</td>
<td>EUSBSR has been built upon a dynamic network of cooperation made of the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, the Baltic Sea NGO Network, the Baltic Sea State sub-national cooperation, Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation, Council of the Baltic Sea States, Baltic Marine Environmental Protection Commission, Northern Dimension, Nordic Council of Ministers, Union of the Baltic Cities, Vision and Strategies around the Baltic.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Operational level</strong></td>
<td>Stakeholders have been recently engaged in the implementation of the strategy by participating in the Pillars task forces. This participation is on a voluntary basis, and with the agreement of Member States representatives. Task forces meet approximately 4 time a year.</td>
<td>Several action groups include representatives from civil society organisations. The EUSALP is a frontrunner on the inclusion of young people. It established in 2021 the EUSALP Youth Council. In 2022, it established an Alpine Universities Alliance of 26 Universities.</td>
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**Macro-Regions benefit from a solid technical assistance and monitoring tools**

The Macro-Regions benefit from the direct support of INTERREG programmes for their functioning. This support ensures constant research for better governance mechanisms. Besides, Macro-Regions benefit from a joint monitoring tool which is ESPON.

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<th>Technical assistance</th>
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<td>An <strong>Assistance mechanism</strong> financed by CINEA and shared with the WestMed and Black Sea Synergy. A budget of <strong>3,000,000 EUR</strong>, for <strong>2 years</strong> for the <strong>3 strategies</strong> has been fixed (<strong>1,000,000 /basin</strong>). In 2017-2018, the Assistance Mechanism for the Atlantic amounted <strong>800 000.00 EUR</strong>. Its role is to provide stakeholders with updated information on the Atlantic strategy news, events and the update of the maritime data hub. The new contract delivered recently stipulated that the mechanism should also facilitate synergies among the three sea-basins strategies and the coordination with other EMFAF projects such as Blue Invest and MSP Assistance mechanism as well as INTERREG programmes.</td>
<td>The INTERREG Alpine Macro-Region finances the governance mechanisms of the Strategy. It is embodied by the <strong>AlpGOV project</strong> amounting <strong>3.003.076,8 Euro</strong> (30 months, from January 2020 to June 2022) and led by Lombardia. In 2022, Sud-PACA Region has been chosen to host the Alpine Macro-Region Technical Secretariat. It employs <strong>6 persons full time</strong>. Financial resources are provided by the Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur, Lombardy and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and the Alpine Space programme for the 2023 to 2025 period. The team is composed of people from different regions. The Secretariat aims at supporting events and awareness raising activities, leveraging partnership opportunities and drawing up transnational projects, facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue as well as embedding processes, measuring impact, reporting on results, ensuring technical, administrative and financial coordination of the Alpine Space Programme “Support EUSALP” project.</td>
<td>In 2014, Interreg BSR 2014-2020 started allocating budget to the Strategy governance (Priority 4 “Cooperation governance”), with specific support to: (1) Assistance to the policy area coordinators of the EUSBR - EUR 3,9 Million until December 2024 ; (2) Organisation of Strategy Forum once a year, - up to EUR 160,000 for each forum (3) Assistance to a Strategy point (administrative support, capacity building, communication) - EUR 1,2 Million until September 2025. In October 2022, the City of Hamburg and Turku have been granted the Baltic Sea Point Secretariat, fully funded by INTERREG Baltic Sea programme. It employs <strong>6 people full time</strong>. The Policy Area coordinators are full time jobs <strong>fully financed by INTERREG Baltic</strong>. National or Regional public administrations do not finance this staff. The <strong>Interact Programme</strong> provided support to the Strategy from 2010 until 2015 with communication materials and organisation of meetings. Let’s Communicate started in the period 2016-2018, and took over this responsibility of communication from the Interact Programme.</td>
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Monitoring assistance

The Atlantic Assistance Mechanism recently published an Implementation report (here). When it comes to project development, the report concentrates rather on the identification of good practices related to the pillars area.

From 2016, as requested by the Council, every second year the Commission publishes an implementation report of the four MRS. It assesses the state of play and progress on implementing the MRS and examines ways forward. It is complemented by a staff working document (SWD) which provides specific information on each MRS.

ESRON (European Spatial Planning Observation Network) also observes development trends and patterns at the level of the four macro-regional strategies (MRS).

- **Macro-Regions incentivize projects development supported by different EU funds**

Beyond the direct support of INTERREG budgets to the governance of the Macro-Regions, Macro-Regions also created **mechanisms to streamline EU funding** towards their priorities. The 2022 European Commission report on the implementation of Macro-regions shared that they have strengthened the relations the respective specialists in participating countries responsible for facilitating engagement with EU financing instruments. The creation of technical secretariat led by regional authorities has also consolidated the embedding of funding of ERDF/ESF+/EARDF/EMFAF.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Interreg Programme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERREG programme</td>
<td>No coordination between INTERREG Joint Secretariat and ASC</td>
<td>The Alpine Space Programme contributes to the objectives of EUSALP (2021-2027 ERDF budget amounts EUR 107 051 188.00 and concerns 7 countries).</td>
<td>EUSBSR is instrumental to the preparation of the Interreg Baltic Sea Programme. The INTERREG Baltic programme is considered to be the most utilised source of funding for projects under the strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERDF / ESF+ / EARDF / EMFAF</td>
<td>No coordination</td>
<td>DG REGIO oversees the implementation of EUSALP ensuring alignment between cohesion funds &amp; the macro-region priorities.</td>
<td>DG REGIO oversees the implementation of EUSBSR. A Network of Managing Authorities of Cohesion Funds was created and used for capacity building purposes preparing the new Multi-Annual Financial Framework (provisions for programmes, guidelines for cooperation).</td>
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<td>Horizon</td>
<td>Regular communication on the Ocean Mission Atlantic-Arctic lighthouse, which covers the restoration of marine ecosystems (not included in Pillar IV).</td>
<td>Nine alpine regions formalised their intention to cooperate on hydrogen by signing a formal Letter of Intent. They develop new project proposals for funding e.g. SPIRALPS (Horizon 2020), AMETHYST (ASP 2021-27). Influence the integration of the hydrogen topic into the current MFF.</td>
<td>No information found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEF</td>
<td>No coordination with the Atlantic Corridor forum</td>
<td>An Assessment Methodology for Individual Projects has served to identify projects providing of sustainable mobility solutions in the Alpine area. In 2021, 6 projects were labelled. The label helps the</td>
<td>No formal coordination with the corridor forum/DG MOVE, although there is a reflection of PA coordinator to participate in the TEN-T Corridor forums and bring a macro-regional dimension to</td>
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</table>
project promoters to communicate the projects' endorsement by the macro-region towards decision-making authorities. The 2021 EUSALP Declaration on Rail Transport in the Alpine Region, aimed at influencing TEN-T negotiation in calling to optimise the potential of rail to serve as the backbone of a connected transport system. These forums (covering missing links, providing macro-regional positions). Appointing a permanent DG MOVE representative to the Transport PA has also been requested.

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<tr>
<th>RRF</th>
<th>No transnational dimension of RRF</th>
<th>No information</th>
<th>No information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EMFAF</td>
<td>Yes, direct EMFF calls for the Strategy</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>DG MARE participates in the governance of EUSBRS providing the strategy with dedicated EMFF calls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Erasmus+, Life, Instrument for Pre-Accession, European Neighbourhood Instrument)</td>
<td>No link</td>
<td>No information</td>
<td>Contribution of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) such as the Interreg South Baltic and Interreg Sweden-Norway programmes</td>
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Macro-Regions have showcased that they can leverage project development and empower stakeholders. 2022 EC report on the implementation of the Macro-Regions has shown concrete examples of projects emanated from the Macro-Regions using different sources of funding.

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<tr>
<td>INTERREG programme</td>
<td>Alignments of priorities but difficult to identify the influence of the Strategy on the INTERREG programme design nor on INTERREG project development. 113 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for 2021-2027 for four EU member countries</td>
<td>Influence the preparation of the new 2021-2027 INTERREG programme. EUSALP Flagship projects financed by INTERREG Alpine Space 107 million euros from ERDF 2021-2027 for 7 countries, including non-EU countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERDF/ESF+</td>
<td>No Atlantic Strategy project although projects with a maritime dimension “fit” with the priorities of the Strategy</td>
<td>During 2014-2020 period, Veneto Region foresaw the attribution of an additional score to applications in line with EUSALP objectives. For 2021-2027 period specific contents of Veneto Operational Programme coordinate with EUSALP objectives, in line with EC indications and the provisions of art. 22 of Regulation (UE) 2021/1060.</td>
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Horizon

No specific Atlantic Strategy project although the Horizon Ocean Mission enabled Sea-Basin calls (lighthouse). It only concerns for the Atlantic the restoration of marine ecosystems which is not an Atlantic Strategy pillar per se.

No information

YES

In policy area Safe, examples of projects funded by Horizon 2020 are: NEEDS, CASCADE and FIRE-IN

The Baltic area benefitted from specific Ocean mission calls (lighthouse)

CEF

No Atlantic Strategy projects.
Projects development have been leveraged by the Atlantic forum led separately by DG MOVE. It only concern core network sections.

No information

YES

In policy areas of Ship and Safe, most projects have been funded by the directly managed funds such as CEF

RRF

No Atlantic Strategy projects

No information

No information

EMFF

YES

DG MARE developed EMFF calls flagged for the Atlantic. It notably triggered to one existing project on ports as hub of the Atlantic Area (1 million euros).

Lately an EMFF call was open “Regional flagships projects supporting sustainable blue economy in EU sea basins”. It dedicated 2 million is to the Atlantic Sea Basin for diversification of fisheries activities.

Not applicable

YES

The EMFF call “Regional flagships projects supporting sustainable blue economy in EU sea basins” is open and concerns also the Baltic area (0.6 million euros for initiatives on regenerative ocean farming)

Erasmus+

No Atlantic Strategy projects

No information

No information

Life

No Atlantic Strategy projects

No information

YES

Life Taiga I and II, Life CONNECTS and Life IP Rich Waters projects.

Other

Routes4U project developed with the Council of Europe

Beyond leveraging EU financial support, Macro-Regions have also been able to adapt to the political context and organise study visit or seminar to share best practices inside the priority areas.

The Atlantic Strategy

Online workshops were organised by the pillar coordinators. Some of them were open to the general public, beyond the members of pillars task forces.

The Alpine Macro-Region

Priority Area “Natural risk Hazard” investigated the existing national regulatory frameworks in hazard management and mapped governance mechanisms that are in place in a comparable manner (see here)

These types of activities are also featured in the Annual Fora

The Baltic Macro-Region

Priority Area “Secure” Steering Group members have shared their experience in gathering and distributing help to Ukraine to emerging needs for equipment such as fire trucks. Study visits are planned aimed at learning from the Polish experience, knowledge exchange and inventorying future needs of all actors involved.
• Cooperation with non-EU countries

The Macro-Regions have shown experiences of allowing work on equal footing between EU and non-EU states. For the moment, the Atlantic Maritime Strategy does not have this experience. The UK left the Atlantic Maritime Strategy at the time of Brexit.

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<tr>
<td>No non-EU state is a member of the Strategy. Galway and Belem Statements which are Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Cooperation agreement with Canada, USA, Brazil, South Africa have progressively become independent from the Atlantic strategy. The Portuguese chairs the presidency of the Atlantic Strategy has announced recently its willingness to develop the international dimension of the strategy and “bring more geographies to share their experience and best practices”</td>
<td>EUSALP has a perimeter of 7 countries, among which five are EU Member States: Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Slovenia and two are non- EU: Switzerland and Lichtenstein. It gathers a total of 48 regions located in the Alpine area. Switzerland chairs EUSALP in 2023.</td>
<td>EUSBSR participating countries are Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. The Strategy also includes Iceland and Norway.</td>
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2. Inspiration for the Atlantic Area: possible scenarios of governance for the future Atlantic Macro-Regions

The current Atlantic Action Plan 2.0 has improved the governance of the Atlantic Strategy compared to the first Action Plan 2013-2019, notably with the creation of pillar coordinators and task forces. However, the AAP 2.0 still has a higher level of flexibility of involving different levels of governance than Macro-Regions. The AAP 2.0 flexibility has sometimes led to interesting ad hoc innovative practices (e.g. Terms of Reference of the Atlantic Strategy Committee led by the Spanish Presidency). However, it has also meant a variable political ownership of the strategy and low capacity to have ambitious actions. The Strategy has often relied on the good will of interested parties without providing stakeholders a minimum of financial support to allow a structured participation in the governance of the strategy, except with the creation of an Assistance mechanism provided by consultancy companies.

With regards the role of Regions, no evolution has been made to clarify their concrete and direct involvement in national delegations (except for France). It remains at the discretion of the States to coordinate with regions. The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat still ensures the coordination between the representatives of Atlantic Member States and its Member Regions, as “associated member” to the Atlantic Strategy Committee.

Hence the current Atlantic Arc Commission reflection on adapting the Macro-Regions governance model to the Atlantic. The following sub-sections present different scenarios of formal involvement of regions in an Atlantic Macro-Region.

• Scenario 1: An Atlantic Macro-Region with a full multi-level governance and greater political engagements of all levels of governance

This scenario would imply a greater political impetus of the Member States to the Strategy with ministerial meetings / general assemblies of the strategy deciding on the future of the strategy ; a political engagement of regions as well as a systematic technical participation at strategic and operational levels ; a more structured participation of the civil society to the Strategy with a more transparent and open process of involvement in the Pillar task Forces. Instead of an Assistance mechanism composed of consultancy companies to ensure the coordination and communication, the INTERREG programme could support the direct involvement of Regions in the governance, as exemplified by AlpGOV.
In terms of requirements from Regions, this could mean:

- The participation of their political representatives once a year for the annual event;

- 30% of a full-time job to follow the Atlantic Strategy Committee (4/year) and one or more pillar task force meetings (4/year). Regions designate one responsible person or more to follow the pillar coordination meetings. They will be able to receive financial support from INTERREG if designated as pillar coordinator;

- Being part of an AtlanticGov project supported by INTERREG Atlantic Area (ISO1) to improve the Atlantic Macro-Region governance structures and mechanisms to push the Strategy towards a future of embedding into the mainstream policies for regional development and cohesion;

- Hosting/co-hosting the Technical Secretariat of the Strategy with the financial support of INTERREG Atlantic Area;

In conclusion, the strategy has a true multi-level governance to allow tangible results benefitting to regions and stakeholders. However, it would imply a greater level of commitment (human and financial) from the regional authorities which could be difficult to achieve for some regions, although supported by the INTERREG programme.

• Scenario 2: An Atlantic Macro-Region with variable involvement of Regions according to their capacities

This scenario would imply a variable involvement of regions at political and technical levels according to their competences, political priorities and human resources capacities. It would mean finding working arrangements between regions which want to do more and regions which do not want a prominent role in the governance of the strategy.

Examples:

- An annual general assembly of the strategy open to all regional political representatives but a mechanism could be thought to allow a variable participation of region. For example, the regions of the State chairing the Presidency of the Strategy or the Atlantic Arc Commission presidency would ensure a regional representation. The Atlantic Arc Commission’s own working arrangements could allow a consolidated position of regions to the debates of the General Assembly;

- Strategy Committees allow the participation of regions (at director levels) as part of national delegations. One region can take the lead of participating to meetings alongside its State, on a rotative basis, and bears the coordination efforts with its regional counterparts at national level. The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat can also provide a support to coordinate the different regional delegations.

- Regions can choose or not to participate in pillar coordination meetings. They can leave the responsibility to designated stakeholders working in the field of interest of the pillar and ensure a coordination at regional level on a regular basis. A coordination between regions could be ensured by the Atlantic Arc Commission via its thematic working groups.

- An AtlanticGov project led by the Atlantic Arc Commission to reflect on the Atlantic Macro-Region governance structures and mechanisms of embedding funding programmes. Only interested regions participate in the consortium.

In conclusion, the strategy would be more flexible. It would do economies of scale by relying on existing coordination schemes (such as the Atlantic Arc Commission) and allow a variable involvement of regions in the strategy according to their capacities and political priorities. However, coordination mechanisms need to be carefully discussed among regional delegations. In particular, if it is chosen to rely more on the Atlantic Arc Commission capacity for the coordination efforts, a special attention
should be given to non-Atlantic Arc Commission Regions that are included in the geography of the Atlantic Strategy.

- **Testing scenarios step-by-step**

The different scenarios evoked above are not excluding each other and could be also considered as different steps of one process achieving a full multi-level Atlantic macro-region. For example, Atlantic regions may prefer a scenario 2 as a first evolution of the current Atlantic Strategy, and work later towards scenario 1. This step-by-step strategy would also recognise that Macro-Region are learning by doing processes, made of concrete experimentalations, picking up what best work for the area. Besides, the political context may change in the course of time, as exemplified by the recent decentralisation law in Portugal, granting continental regional administrations more competences in areas of economy, culture, education, professional training, health, conservation of nature, land use planning, agriculture, forest and infrastructures.

### 3. Reflection for the post-2027 and the role of new Macro-Regions

Having a new Macro-Region in the European landscape in which Western Europe countries are involved would mean that Macro-Regions would gain even more importance in the European Commission practices and internal reflections on the post 2027 programming period.

- **Suppressing the 3 ‘No’ rule?**

In this possible new context, more impetus will be given to the Commission to rethink and adapt the Macro-Regional models, in particular the rule of the 3 “No” that has guided their functioning so far. The 3 “No” mean that Macro-Region cannot create a new institution, a new legislation nor a funding scheme to support its implementation. This rule was decided at the beginning of the creation of Macro-Regions when the European Commission had to have a defensive approach to avoid any disruption of existing mechanisms by this new concept. Fifteen years later, now that participating parties have shown seriousness in the implementation of the Macro-Regions and that new Macro-Regions are being developed, a reconsideration of this 3 “No” rule would have better chances to happen.

It is to be noted that this 3 ‘No’ rule has already been bypassed by the different Macro-Regions: the General Assemblies of the Alpine Macro-Region could be somehow considered as a new “institution”, the technical assistance of INTERREG to the governance of the Macro-Regions could be seen as a dedicated funding scheme, the influence that certain Macro-Regions have over legislations (on cohesion policy) or the ministerial declarations that are produced within Macro-Regions may look similar to new legislations. Converting this rule into a 3 ‘Yes’ rule providing that certain conditions are fulfilled would be a very important work to be performed by the CPMR members in the near future.

- **A tool to influence the post 2027 policies impacting regions?**

A new Macro-Region would also mean greater chances to position regions in the reflection on EU policies which have an impact on territorial development.

In a medium term, Macro-Regions have the potential to launch a reflection around the simplification of Cohesion Policy. With embedding processes initiated by existing Macro-Regions, relevant parties have looked at obstacles preventing the use of ERDF funds for transnational actions. A coordination at Atlantic level would allow to compare the rules guiding the implementation of ERDF/ESF+/EARDF/EMFF and prompting Member States to lower their national provisions which have complexified lately the use of cohesion policy funds.

In the longer term, Macro-Regions could be used as another tool to ensure that EU investment policies are not territorially blind. In its Crete Declaration, the CPMR regrets that recently proposed legislation falls short of properly addressing the diversity of challenges and opportunities European regions feature, ignoring or minimising their regional impact. In its comprehensive reflection on the future of cohesion policy, CPMR has warned about the possibility that the regional dimension could be losing its status as a core principle for the implementation of Cohesion Policy. Centralisation provisions emerged
with the Corona Response Investment Initiative (CRII) and its follow-up package (CRII+) introducing the possibility for Member-States to reallocate existing structural funds. The transfers and thematic concentration also became present in the provisions governing the REACT-EU and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

In this context, the Atlantic Macro-Region could be used as another tool to deliver a common vision of the territorial development of the Atlantic Area and ensure that EU policies take into account or acknowledge the Atlantic area specificities.

**Conclusions and next steps**

Based on this paper, the Atlantic Arc Commission Member Regions are invited on 1st March 2023, in the Atlantic Arc Commission Political Working Seminar to identify the best governance model for the Atlantic Area, in particular when it comes to the regional involvement in the governance structures of the strategy. Three questions will guide the debates and on which the political representatives will be invited to give answers:

1) What do you think works well in the current Atlantic Strategy governance and what works less well?

2) What mechanisms from the other Macro-regions’ should we use for the Atlantic?

3) Which scenario of governance would fit most the Atlantic Area?