

The Atlantic Arc Commission's contribution to the revision of the Atlantic Action Plan

Context:

The Atlantic Strategy is the first EU Maritime Strategy. It involves the five Atlantic Member States (Portugal, Spain, France, the United Kingdom and Ireland) and Atlantic stakeholders.

The Strategy was published by the European Commission in **2011** and an Action Plan was adopted by the Council in **2013**. An Atlantic Strategy Group (ASG) currently steers the Strategy. It is composed of the five Member States, the European Commission (DG MARE and DG REGIO mainly, but also DG Research and others), the Committee of the Regions (CoR), and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). The CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission is a full member of the ASG, representing Atlantic Regions.

The Atlantic Action Plan (AAP) is one of the main tools for the implementation of the Atlantic Strategy. In February 2018, the European Commission undertook an evaluation process of the AAP. After a series of consultation workshops in the five Atlantic Member States, the ASG is now looking to amend the AAP. A Commission Communication or a Ministerial Declaration taking stock of these conclusions and aiming to replace the current AAP is expected by mid-end 2019.

The CPMR's Atlantic Arc Commission Regions have contributed to this process. The [Comillas Declaration](#) in 2018 set a number of guidelines in contribution to this debate. The Atlantic Regions were active in defending the need to maintain the Atlantic Interreg Area programme. In September 2018, a CPMR delegation, including the chair of the Atlantic Arc Commission, met with French MEP Pascal Arimont, *Rapporteur* on Interreg, to promote the importance of the Interreg Atlantic Area and to reinstate the maritime priority of the cross-border programme. In addition to that, exploratory meetings and discussions have taken place with Atlantic Member States to investigate the opportunity for developing an Atlantic Macro-region.

This document aims to gather Atlantic Arc Commission members' suggestions on the Portuguese Presidency proposal on the renewed Atlantic Action Plan, in terms of priorities, governance and financing.

Executive Summary:

The Atlantic Arc Commission Regions are generally satisfied with the proposed Action Plan, both in terms of the priorities chosen and the governance model proposed. However, some issues still need particular attention. This paper attempts to analyse the possible governance and financial schemes in response to each priority. Priorities have also been revised to mirror the needs of the Atlantic Arc Commission Regions. The key role of Regions within the governance of the Atlantic Strategy is also duly outlined and explained.

KEY MESSAGES:

- ❖ The CPMR's Atlantic Arc Commission secretariat should remain a full member of the Atlantic Strategy Group (ASG). Reducing the Atlantic Arc Commission's status to observer would undermine the role of regions in the governance of the Atlantic Strategy. In fact, it is necessary to strengthen and defend the Regions' role from within the regions themselves.
- ❖ We, Member Regions of the Atlantic Arc Commission, support the principle of regional representatives participating as part of their national delegations to ASG meetings, as is the case in the governance of the Alpine Strategy, and respecting the institutional framework of each Member State.
- ❖ Where Atlantic Arc Commission members have the resources and capacity to act as thematic coordinators, we would support them taking on this role. The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat could provide technical support to its members in carrying out their functions in this role.
- ❖ Furthermore, the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat should seek closer cooperation with the Assistance Mechanism where the work of the Atlantic Arc Commission complements that of the Assistance Mechanism.
- ❖ The INTERREG Atlantic Area Programme should adapt its priorities to the thematic priorities identified in the Atlantic Action Plan, even more so now that the next funding period is being drawn up. In fact, we must keep in mind that a new scenario, in terms of drawing up new financing, may arise with the exit of the United Kingdom from the EU. However, we ask for more time in order to draw up the new Action Plan for working with the European Commission to integrate all stakeholders involved in the negotiation of the Atlantic Area Operational Plan.
- ❖ The Atlantic Arc Commission urges Member States to include a reflection on a possible joint financing bonus for ERDF projects that meet the objectives of sea basin strategies in their Council debates about the new multiannual financial framework.
- ❖ Also, we recall the Comillas Declaration of June 2018, which requested the Atlantic Arc Commission explore the possibility of moving towards a Macro-regional Strategy.

Priority 1: Improve Atlantic connectivity

- **Thematic priority:** The first priority set out in the Portuguese proposal is *Atlantic port as hub of blue economy*, which aims at tackling both ports as incubators for maritime economy and as key to Atlantic connectivity. As connectivity is a challenge in itself, which not only encompasses ports connectivity, but also the development of their hinterland, the Atlantic Arc Commission recommends that 'Connectivity' should be made a separate priority in its own right.
- **Flagship projects** : During the Atlantic Arc Commission [General Assembly in Comillas](#) (June 2018), the Atlantic Arc Commission Transport working group set out a number of activities for 2019. These correspond to the suggested actions in the Portuguese draft and could become Atlantic Flagship projects:
 - In parallel with the finalisation of TEN-T priority corridors, seek common position in order to better endorse good connectivity of the Atlantic Regions and adapt TEN-T maps to connect the Atlantic Regions with the rest of Europe.
 - This could be done in the framework of the Atlantic Forum where the Atlantic Arc Commission could play a prominent role.
 - This Forum could consider the issues of:
 - Removing railway bottlenecks due to capacity, or necessary cargo separation (difference in track gauge on the Atlantic border between Irun, Spain and Hendaye, France, for example).
 - Driving action that promotes a modal shift toward more sustainable modes of transport, specifically railway travel, as much for passenger trains as for freight trains, and, in this way, support the development of the Atlantic Rolling Highway.
 - Supporting port-railway connections, as much on the level of existing infrastructure as on that of the connection between TEN-T corridors and their connections and other Atlantic Arc lines.
 - Highlight the added value of the Motorways of the Seas to connect Ireland to the continent in the context of Brexit, but also that of the instruments to develop the energy transition (ecobonus Med-Atlantic or CORE LNGas HIVE¹).
- **Governance:** In order to make best use of the relevant experience of regions in specific sectors, we would propose that the region leading the Atlantic Arc Commission thematic group on transport has the possibility to lead the corresponding AAP thematic group, should capacity and resources permit. In this case, the delegated region should lead a group of Atlantic Regions, but also gather a wider range of national and regional stakeholders interested in EU transport policy, such as Atlantic core and global ports, rail operators, ferry lines and other logistical stakeholders. DG MOVE should be involved in this priority. The delegated region could then report the conclusions of its meetings (vision and revision) to the ASG.

Taking stock of the workshop "Ireland's European Connectivity - Ports and maritime links in the Atlantic Sea Basin" organised by the European Coordinators in Dublin on 16-17 April 2019, the Atlantic Arc Commission Transport Working Group has planned to develop a seminar

¹ **CORE LNGas HIVE** is a Project financed by CEF for the development of an integrated, secure and efficient logistics chain for LNG (Liquid Natural Gas) supply lines in the TEN-T Atlantic corridor and Mediterranean ports: <http://corelngashive.eu/en/>

on the TEN-T Revision after summer 2019. This event could be another step towards improving Atlantic connectivity to the rest of the EU.

- **Financing:** The CEF programme is the EU fund dedicated to connectivity in the EU. As proposed in the [CPMR Position on EU Strategies with a Macro-Regional Dimension](#) (March 2017), the Atlantic Arc Commission is calling for dedicated calls for projects to tackle the Atlantic, in particular, keeping in mind that there are still some unfinished priority infrastructures pending in this Corridor, the CEF maps, and the Regions which are not yet covered by the TEN-T maps. In addition, the Atlantic Arc Commission supports the proposal of the European Parliament, adopted by the Council in February 2019, to have a specific Brexit fund to mitigate the impact of Brexit on EU transport.

Priority 2: Foster Maritime Spatial Planning and cooperation on Atlantic Maritime S3 to foster Atlantic territorial cohesion

- **Thematic priority:** Ports should not be the only focal point for innovation in Atlantic maritime sectors. Maritime activities are not only based in ports, they can develop all along the coastline, and within sectors such as aquaculture and fish farming. Maritime activities play a role in territorial cohesion, in reducing EU carbon emissions, and can be a mark of cultural identity. The maritime sectors of the Atlantic, in particular blue bio-economy, including fisheries, aquaculture, blue biotechnologies, maritime industries, maritime heritage and coastal tourism, should involve cooperation on maritime spatial planning and cooperation on innovation in a broader sense than simply port cooperation. Both positions should include observations on land/sea interaction and pay particular attention to climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- **Flagship projects:** In order to avoid having a too broad priority which has been identified as a problem in the evaluation of the first Atlantic Action Plan, the Atlantic Arc Commission suggests to the ASG to limit this priority to a certain number of flagship projects on maritime spatial planning and cooperation on innovation.

Maritime spatial planning. Maritime spatial planning (MSP) is a transversal process, involving concerted action to better develop a series of activities at sea and in coastal territories. This thematic area requires multi-level governance and transnational cooperation to better plan maritime activities. The Atlantic Strategy is key in developing both the transnational and multi-level governance needed to coordinate maritime spatial planning. On this topic, the Atlantic Arc Commission recommends the Atlantic Strategy put in place projects that foster collaboration between public authorities of all levels on Maritime Spatial Planning, taking the [example of SIMNORAT project](#). The SIMNORAT project, managed by the SHOM (the French Hydrographic and Oceanic Service) and supported by the Atlantic Arc Commission, aimed to support the implementation of the MSP Directive by Member States in their marine waters in the North Atlantic region of Europe (OSPAR IV). Further actions could be envisaged to foster transboundary approaches looking at national policies of the countries involved regarding environmental conservation priorities and the priorities concerning economic development of maritime sectors.

Cooperation on innovation. Flagship projects could be developed on financing of collaboration in Maritime Smart Specialisation areas specific to the Atlantic. The Atlantic Arc Commission performed a mapping of Atlantic S3s and found that the following areas were the most common within Atlantic S3s: marine renewable energy, energy efficiency, offshore energy, sustainable tourism, transport and ports, fisheries and aquaculture, maritime industries, shipbuilding, health, food quality and security, and wellbeing. Further Flagship projects could include, projects that develop investment platforms at sea-basin level, lobbying activities

to shape key EU funds to support Atlantic maritime sectors, or organisation of Atlantic fairs. The Atlantic Strategy could also enable alignment of policies to increase competitiveness through innovation and to mainstream the use of advanced technologies².

○ **Governance:**

- A platform of key stakeholders for coastal space and maritime planning in the Atlantic, with the resources to drive innovative and forward-moving projects on a multilevel governance-scale, could be developed, such as the SIMNORAT project, coordinated by SHOM (French Hydrographic and Oceanic Service), in which the AAC was involved.
- Atlantic Arc Commission Regions could take a prominent role in the thematic group on innovation. The thematic group on innovation should gather a series of stakeholders including investors, clusters, and research centres as well as the relevant administrative bodies. DG MARE should also be involved in this thematic group as it is developing a blue investment platform, which recognises the role of regions and their S3 in innovation.

- **Financing:** EMFF MSP calls could be replicated. On cooperation on Smart Specialisation Strategies, the AAC supports the creation of a component 5 for INTERREG and suggests giving an Atlantic Maritime Dimension to future cooperation under this programme. A specific Atlantic Blue Investment Platform pooling private and public sources of funding, as proposed by Portugal could also be further explored as an interesting source of funding for regional S3. A line of work which allows for the exchange of experiences and best practices, as well as projects, with other maritime regions should likewise be established.

Priority 3: Cooperation to support blue skills

- **Thematic priority:** Disparities between the education on offer and the needs of the private sector in terms of competency are a challenge, as well as in the quality and resourcing of research centres are challenges that could be further addressed within the Atlantic Strategy. The reinforcement of alliances between key stakeholders such as educational institutions (University, Professional Training and “dual” training), businesses and research centres would contribute to the excellence of the Atlantic maritime sectors.
- **Flagship projects:** The BBMBC project, developed within the Atlantic Arc Commission under the leadership of the region of Nouvelle Aquitaine in France, was an excellent example of pooling resources on maritime training. As part of the project, universities and SMEs active in the sector of blue biotechnology in the Atlantic developed a joint curriculum and innovative training courses. The [political recommendations](#) developed by project partners, recommended the BBMBC project be replicated across the Atlantic and in other maritime sectors. The project also revealed the need to raise awareness among high school students of the job possibilities in maritime sectors.

The Erasmus Mundus Master « [Master REM – Renewable Energy in the Marine environment](#) » in which the UPV/EHU (University of the Basque Country), the Centrale University of Nantes, the University of Strathclyde and NTNU-Trondheim all participate, or CPMR’s “Vasco Da Gama” Project, aimed at promoting the labour mobility of young people, are other flagship projects that reinforce the skilled labour environment in the sectors of a maritime basin.

² Reference: COMMENTS TO THE UPDATED ACTION PLAN FOR A SUITABLE, RESILIENT AND COMPETITIVE BLUE ECONOMY IN THE EU ATLANTIC AREA, by the Basque Maritime Forum (Autoridad Portuaria de Bilbao, Centro Tecnológico AZTI-Tecnalia, Basquetour, Museo Marítimo Ría de Bilbao, Biscay Marine Energy Platform (BIMEP), Uniport Bilbao, Foro Marítimo Vasco...)

Common initiatives at the Atlantic level could be also developed to foster Atlantic territorial cohesion, including for example establishment of a collaborative network of museums and organisations to protect the Atlantic cultural and industrial heritage and to promote traditional maritime activities³, as well as its legacy.

- **Governance:** The region of Nouvelle Aquitaine, who led the BBMBC project, and other member regions of the Atlantic Arc, have extensive experience of gathering actors active in the field of maritime training in the Atlantic. Thus, we would recommend a closer alignment of the work of the ASG thematic group on skills with that of the Atlantic Arc Commission and a greater role in this thematic group for the Atlantic Arc Commission Members. If the Atlantic Arc Commission Region leading on skills has the capacity to lead the corresponding ASG thematic group, the Atlantic Arc Commission would encourage this, and the Atlantic Arc Commission secretariat would support its member region in this role. Nouvelle Aquitaine has outlined plans to develop a project which would map educational offers in the Atlantic's maritime sector. This work would be directly relevant to the work of the thematic group on skills, as much in higher education as in professional training and dual education. DG MARE should be involved in this work to further shape financing schemes that contribute to this aim. DG EAC, DG EMPL and DG GROW should also be involved in the discussions as they have a stake in these issues and participate in the EU New Skills Agenda.
- **Financing:** Atlantic Arc Regions propose that Erasmus calls be developed for projects dedicated to the Atlantic S3 sectors. The European Commission's proposal for the future of ERASMUS post-2020 recognised the need to link ERASMUS+ to regional Smart Specialisation Strategies. The Atlantic Arc Commission would support this. Furthermore, we, the Atlantic Arc Commission, believe that the call on blue careers should be replicated and dedicated to creating a sea-basin skills ecosystem.

Priority 4: Atlantic as leader of MRE in the EU

- **Thematic priority:** The Atlantic Arc Commission has been very supportive of the inclusion of MRE as a key priority of the Atlantic Strategy. The Atlantic Arc Commission is working to promote the potential of MRE in the Atlantic Arc, by exploring the possibility of setting specific objectives, such as installation capacity of the Atlantic Arc, and by fostering the inclusion of MRE objectives in the Atlantic National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) of Atlantic states.
- **Flagship projects:** The Atlantic Arc Commission agrees with Portugal's proposal, and believes there is a need for a similar declaration to further harmonise NECPs in favour of the development of MRE in the Atlantic. Specific objectives on MRE in the NECPs could be promoted among public and private stakeholders.

Furthermore, MRE-related projects should **drive a competitive value chain**, opportunities to demonstrate and validate emerging renewable marine technologies, and the future planning of power plants via MREs. Continuing in the vein of the AAC-backed *Atlantic Power Cluster Project*, or the OPERA project - *Open Sea Operating Experience to Reduce Wave Energy Cost*⁴, would be of great interest.

³ Reference: Contributions to the document on a new Action Plan for the European Atlantic area following the request of the "Atlantic Maritime Strategy" of the Basque Maritime Forum, Inigo Uriarte, 27/02/2019

⁴ The **OPERA** project- Open Sea Operating Experience to Reduce Wave Energy Cost, financed by the H2020 programme, is a clear example of collaboration between value chain, research centres and Atlantic Arc testing infrastructures in order to develop a device to exploit wave power. <http://opera-h2020.eu/>

Additionally, the Atlantic Strategy could support the **demonstration and validation of emerging renewable marine technologies**: the Atlantic Arc relies on testing infrastructure in order to try out and validate renewable marine technologies. In this sense, the **Blue-Gift** project⁵, funded by INTERREG Atlantic Space, is an excellent example that ought to be capitalised on.

Finally, the Atlantic Strategy could coordinate **the planning of future power plants**: numerous studies of varying precision on wave, current and wind power resources in the Atlantic area exist today. The integration of these studies into a map of potentialities would be of great interest and could furthermore be completed with valuable information such as the existence of ports, industry and adequate power connections.

- **Governance**: The Basque Country, which leads the MRE working group of the Atlantic Arc Commission, and other Atlantic Arc Commission Member Regions are well connected in MRE-relevant networks such as Vanguard, S3 Platform on MRE, WindEurope, and Ocean Energy Europe, and have experience in bringing together actors in MRE in the Atlantic. Thus, we call for closer alignment between the Atlantic Arc Commission thematic working group on MRE and the thematic group on MRE of the Atlantic Strategy. Where resources and capacity permit, we would support a greater role for Atlantic Arc Commission Regions in the thematic working groups of the ASG. The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat would support its members in taking on such a role. DGs MARE, ENER and GROW should be involved to further streamline financing schemes in support of MRE.
- **Financing**: Marine renewable energy projects have been developed through ERDF (INTERREG and regional/national programmes), NER 300, Horizon2020, LIFE, National and Regional Funds, the EIB, and CEF Energy calls. Those funding opportunities should be targeted when developing Atlantic flagship projects. Innovative financial mechanisms, such as Pre-Commercial Procurement could be developed⁶. As in previous sections, specific Atlantic calls, cofinancing bonuses and an Atlantic Blue Platform could be created.

Priority 5: The EU Atlantic area is clean and its coasts resilient

- **Thematic priority**: The Atlantic Arc Commission is very supportive of the inclusion of the protection of coastal environment and adaptation to climate change as a key priority of the Atlantic Strategy. Asturias and Cantabria recently experienced devastating floods caused by winter storms in the Atlantic. These storms caused significant natural and infrastructure damage and cost the lives of citizens in the affected Regions. This is in addition to the fragility of the Atlantic coast caused by rising sea levels and ongoing coastal erosion.

Both regions recently asked the Atlantic Arc Commission to carry out specific work focusing on having best practice and making better use of EU funding to manage climate events.

- **Flagship projects**: The Atlantic Arc Commission agrees with Portugal's proposal and believes floods should be included along with coastal erosion as a key challenge for the Atlantic. The Atlantic Arc Commission plans to gather a pool of experts to share best practice between Atlantic regions management of flood, coastal and hydrographic river basin management. This event could provide a kick-off for activities of the Atlantic Strategy in this area.

⁵The **Blue Gift** project aims to demonstrate ocean power technologies in order to reduce technological risks and cost. The following testing areas are on offer: BiMEP (wave and floating wind power) in the Basque Country, PLOCAN (wave and floating wind power) in Gran Canaria, SEENEOH (hydrokinetic and tidal) in Bordeaux, WavEC (wave and floating wind power) in Aguçadoura.

⁶ In the case of the Basque Country's Regional FEDER 2014-2020 Programme, this kind of intervention has been planned and conducted within Thematic Objective 4 (Low Carbon Energy), specifically a Pre-Commercial Public Procurement of the development of an offshore floating wave-energy converter.

Furthermore, the example of the work done by the Spanish Ministry for Ecological Transition, which collaborates with coastal Autonomous Communities in order to assess risks and come up with possible scenarios could be replicated and its results co-opted into the Atlantic Strategy framework.

- **Governance:** A member region of the Atlantic Arc Commission with particular experience in this field, could lead the Atlantic Strategy thematic working group on coastal resilience. If a Member Region of the Atlantic Arc Commission has the capacity to lead an ASG thematic group, the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat would fully support them in this role. DG MARE should be involved to further streamline financing schemes in this area.
- **Financing:** ERDF, Solidarity Fund, EIB, National Funds, and Regional Funds have enabled projects in the field of environment, adaptation to climate change, and waste management. These funding opportunities should be targeted when developing Atlantic flagship projects in this field.

CONCLUSION: Atlantic Arc Commission proposal to improve the Atlantic Strategy

Ministerial and Regional Presidents meetings

Atlantic Strategy Group

Member States / Atlantic Arc Commission coastal regions, accompanied by CPMR's Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat / EU Commission, EP, CoR, EESC/ATN, AACC

Improve Atlantic connectivity

Collaboration on MSP and on maritime S3

Cooperation to support blue skills and ocean awareness

Atlantic as leader of MRE in the EU

Clean and resilient coastal areas of the Atlantic



OPERATIONAL LEVEL

Thematic coordinators: an AAC Region could take this role.

Role of the group: gather relevant socio-economic stakeholders to develop flagship projects and give feedback on the implementation and possible avenues to improve the Atlantic Strategy



Managing Authority Network could help working on the external dimension of mainstream programmes and give their feedbacks on possible cofinancing bonuses

FINANCING

Assistance mechanism should accompany the development of flagship projects

European Commission Directorates could adapt calls to the Atlantic challenges

Annexes

1. Portuguese Presidency Proposal on the structure of the Atlantic Strategy

