



Atlantic Arc Commission

# Final Declaration Bilbao 2015

27<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Atlantic Arc Commission

17/18 March 2015 – Bilbao (Basque Country-Spain)

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## *Messages from the Atlantic Regions concerning the future of the Atlantic Arc*

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2015 will be a key year for the Atlantic regions. Following protracted negotiations, the Regions are now ready to implement the new cohesion policy programmes for the period 2014-2020. The operational programmes for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) are also being finalised. In addition, the investment plan of European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, was approved by the Council on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2014. This is expected to free up 315 billion euros of public and private sector investment for the real economy over the next three years (2015-2017). Furthermore, the Atlantic Strategy will enter its operational phase, with many different schemes under consideration to unlock the potential of blue growth for the entire maritime basin.

These seem very favourable conditions in which to launch a coordinated investment programme in the Atlantic Arc regions, whilst sending strong messages to European decision-makers aimed at facilitating the introduction of these schemes.

**For this reason, the members of the Atlantic Arc Commission, meeting for their General Assembly in Bilbao on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015, have decided to adopt this final declaration, marking the determination of the Atlantic regions to be involved at the heart of action in Europe, and with the Atlantic Strategy in particular.**

### The aims of this declaration are:

1. To send out a clear message to the European institutions (Commission, Parliament, Council, CoR and EESC) and European decision-makers on our strategic position and our proposals for the future;
2. To take stock of all the action undertaken and under development within the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission, to demonstrate our commitment;
3. To identify possible challenges in the years ahead, which will form the future areas of work for the Atlantic Arc Commission;
4. To ensure the Atlantic Arc Regions are politically engaged in a genuine Europe-wide approach with the aim of kick-starting growth by drawing on the advantages that the Atlantic regions can offer.

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## *Our mission*

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The Atlantic Arc Commission, which includes 19 regional authorities from 5 Member States <sup>1</sup>, is one of the six Geographical Commissions of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR). Through continual discussions and tireless enthusiasm, these Regions are determined to keep the Atlantic peripheral regions firmly focused on innovation and the future, providing economic growth and social and regional cohesion.

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## *Our messages to the European decision-makers*

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### **First Message:**

**The Atlantic Arc Commission would like the Atlantic Maritime Strategy to be given the same recognition as existing macro-regional strategies such as those for the Baltic and the Danube.** The Maritime component must remain a central pillar of this strategy, but recognition of the Atlantic Strategy as a macro-regional strategy would be beneficial both in terms of visibility and in understanding the issues involved.

The macro-regions are a useful governance instrument that enables the implementation of EU growth and jobs objectives at a territorial level.

Since 2009, the Atlantic Arc Commission has been working hard at European level to attain the introduction of a **Macro-Regional Atlantic strategy** based on the strategy model for the Baltic Sea. This vision, which has the support of Atlantic networks such as the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities (CAAC), the Atlantic Transnational Network (RTA-ATN), the Association of Atlantic Arc Chambers of Agriculture (3ACA) as well as the European Parliament and in particular, MEP Alain Cadec (EPP, France), aims to put together a tailor-made European strategy for these lands, linked by a common maritime area - and therefore sharing joint opportunities and challenges.

In 2011, this request resulted in an “Atlantic Maritime Strategy”<sup>2</sup> focusing on maritime challenges, which are essential however incomplete from the Atlantic Regions’ point of view. The link between activities on land and at sea was not established, nor was there mention of transportation and accessibility issues.

The Atlantic Arc Commission would like to pay tribute to the work carried out by DG Mare, the guiding force behind this Maritime Strategy, through the establishment of an Atlantic Forum that enabled many of the stakeholders from maritime environments in the five Atlantic States, to meet over almost two years (2011-2013). The Atlantic Arc Commission worked tirelessly throughout the duration of the Atlantic Forum to ensure that the Action Plan, which was finally adopted in May 2013,<sup>3</sup> best reflected the reality on the ground in these areas, in terms of the existing economic fabric and industrial base, the importance of ports, links between coast and hinterland, areas with high development potential, etc.

To this end, our 2013 contribution<sup>4</sup> enabled the identification of areas for priority investment for the Atlantic Arc regions listed in five categories: Accessibility and Transport, Maritime Industry and Economy, Climate and Environment, Research and Innovation, and Attractiveness of the Regions.

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<sup>1</sup> The five Atlantic Member States are Portugal, Spain, France, United Kingdom and Ireland

<sup>2</sup> COM (2011) 782 final

[http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/sea\\_basins/atlantic\\_ocean/documents/com\\_2011\\_782\\_fr.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/sea_basins/atlantic_ocean/documents/com_2011_782_fr.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> COM (2013) 279 final: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2013:0279:FIN:FR:PDF>

<sup>4</sup> Contribution of the Atlantic Arc Commission of the CPMR to an appeal for proposals by the European Commission concerning priorities for the Atlantic Strategy Action Plan, adopted on 13/02/13: [http://arcatlantique.org/pdf/doc\\_travail/609\\_fr.pdf](http://arcatlantique.org/pdf/doc_travail/609_fr.pdf)

The Atlantic Arc Commission welcomed the fact that the Atlantic Strategy Action Plan broadly included the proposals supported by the Atlantic Arc Commission and was also associated with its steering committee. The success of the *Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Forum* held in Porto on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015 proved the level of interest among those on the ground for this type of integrated approach and demonstrates the significant potential for growth in the Atlantic regions.

Our message supporting the recognition of the Atlantic Maritime Strategy as a macro-regional strategy should therefore be heard through a clear explanation and clarification of the challenges faced. The Macro-Regional Strategies are now widely recognised as a new tool that helps enhance and facilitate cooperation between territories sharing common challenges (sea basins, mountain areas, river basin, etc.). They enjoy support at the highest levels (Commissioners, Heads of State and Governments, etc.) unlike Maritime Strategies, which appear more technical and less political. A Council workgroup has been set up to monitor the progress of these macro-regional strategies with meetings and discussions concerning the means available to facilitate their introduction.

By officially becoming a macro-regional strategy, the Atlantic Strategy could benefit not only from greater visibility at European level and better understanding at all levels, but also from tools designed to help implement these macro-regional strategies and their associated action plans within the territories.

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**Second message:**

**The Atlantic Arc Commission calls on the European Commission to build the programming period of European funds for 2020 upon the priorities of the Atlantic Regions' Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) as well as the Atlantic Strategy Action Plan.** This would bring the available funds into line with the territories' expectations in the maritime economy field.

The Atlantic Arc Commission welcomes the “Blue Growth” calls that were launched under the “Horizon 2020” new Research and Innovation programme, as well as the existence for the first time of a specific budget for the integrated maritime policy (IMP) within the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

The Atlantic Arc Commission wishes to see support for the maritime economy reinforced within other sector-based European Union funding (COSME, LIFE, etc.) so European funds can be raised to match the economic challenge represented by the maritime economy. Besides, this action will help support the Atlantic Strategy priorities.

Against this background, it is the Atlantic regions that are showing the way, since their Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) include a strong maritime dimension, enabling European funding to be earmarked (from Structural and Investment Funds) for maritime priorities. This dimension will be highlighted as part of a summary document currently being prepared to detail the maritime priorities in all the Smart Specialisation Strategies of the Atlantic Arc Commission member regions. Not only will this work help build the Atlantic section of the European platform<sup>5</sup> on maritime investments related to S3 strategies, which was launched by the CPMR, but it will also increase the Atlantic Arc Commission's input into the implementation of the Atlantic Strategy.

Many projects have already been identified within the Atlantic Arc regions (see our 2013 Action Plan)<sup>6</sup>. The ability to identify specific “sea economy” projects within existing funding would very quickly enable the operational application of the Action Plan, which is crucial for the Atlantic Territories and the success of the Atlantic Strategy

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<sup>5</sup> See CPMR's technical paper presented at the Political Bureau in Nantes (27 February 2015) – “European Platform on Maritime Investments Linked to Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies”: [crpm.org](http://crpm.org)

<sup>6</sup> [http://arcatlantique.org/pdf/doc\\_travail/609\\_en.pdf](http://arcatlantique.org/pdf/doc_travail/609_en.pdf)

**Third message:**

**The Atlantic Arc Commission expects the Juncker Plan to fund large structuring projects in the Atlantic Regions.** The Atlantic Arc Commission already has proposals to submit, in particular in the marine leisure, energy efficiency, maritime industries and marine renewable energies sectors.

Unveiled on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2014, the Juncker investment plan hopes to generate between 330 and 410 billion euros in the real economy and create 1.3 million jobs over the next three years (2015-2017) to stimulate growth and reduce unemployment whilst encouraging investors to become more involved. The CPMR and its Atlantic Arc Commission share the view of the European Commission on the need to stimulate investment and create the right conditions for economic recovery

The Atlantic Arc Commission takes it for granted that this European economic recovery plan must fund projects with European added value, dimension which is insufficiently considered in the Juncker Plan proposal. The Juncker Plan must give priority to projects of European strategic importance, such as those that can contribute to the objectives of the Atlantic Strategy Action Plan.

In this regard, the report on the opinion by the Member of the European Parliament and of the Committee on Regional Development, Lambert van Nistelrooij (EPP, NL), points out that although the viability of the projects is the primary criterion for the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), it is important to ensure a geographical balance in Europe. As far as the Atlantic Arc Commission is concerned, the investment plan can only have an added value if it develops in accordance with the strategies implemented by the European Union, such as the Blue Growth Strategy and the Atlantic Strategy.

In its declaration adopted at the Political Bureau meeting in Nantes on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2015<sup>7</sup>, the CPMR highlighted an essential point: the regions have the legitimacy and experience to create the link between public and private sector investors in order to generate growth and create jobs in their own territories. For the Atlantic regions, growth can only be stimulated if it is consistent with the Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3 Strategies) that were prepared by the Regions to establish an effective link between investment and the high-potential economic sectors within their territories. The table of Atlantic-level projects identified by the regions in our document from 2013, combined with the analysis of the Maritime dimension by the S3 in the Atlantic Regions have helped the member Regions of the Atlantic Arc Commission get ready to submit project proposals consistent with the expectations of the territories in order to carry out a European investment policy. In order to voice these messages, the Atlantic Arc Commission has decided to set up a “Juncker Plan” Task Force.

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**Fourth message:**

**The Atlantic Arc Commission calls on the EU to set up an integrated industrial maritime strategy.** Indeed, there is a real potential in terms of growth and jobs in maritime industries in the Atlantic regions which should be supported at the European level.

The maritime industries (marine energies, shipbuilding, fisheries, pleasure-boating, hydrogen marine applications, etc.) now account for a large share of the Atlantic Regions’ economy. The Atlantic Arc Commission considers that maritime industries are the backbone of blue growth. The Atlantic Arc Commission believes that maritime industries are the backbone of blue growth and that strengthening them is one of the essential conditions for implementing the Atlantic Strategy

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<sup>7</sup> See CPMR’s technical paper presented at the Political Bureau in Nantes (27 February 2015) – “European Platform on Maritime Investments Linked to Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies”: [crpm.org](http://crpm.org)

The Atlantic Arc Commission expects the upcoming review of the blue growth strategy to acknowledge the importance of these industries as well as their role in the emergence and development of maritime sectors. The Atlantic Arc Commission considers that the European Union should introduce appropriate tools so that the maritime industries can maintain their drive towards differentiation and diversification and make Europe, in particular the Atlantic basin, a leading player in the maritime economy.

This industrial strategy should provide the possibility to invest heavily in **research** to finance pilot schemes and demonstrators to speed up the industrialisation of new technologies. The Atlantic Arc Commission wishes in particular to draw the attention of the European institutions to the role R&D plays in the development of SMEs. **Innovation** should not be the prerogative of big groups, and so the Atlantic regions believe it is essential to facilitate access to the Horizon 2020 programme for SMEs. Finally, this strategy should support **training** for the industrial professions of tomorrow, especially focusing on new materials or electronic components, which are being increasingly integrated into ships and wind turbines.

The Atlantic Arc Commission finally recalls the potential of the Atlantic sea basin to develop renewable marine energy as explained in a policy document validated in Umeå in September 2014<sup>8</sup>. In this regard, the Atlantic Arc Commission calls on the EU to speed up the development of marine renewable energy by supporting training, innovation and industrialisation.

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#### **Fifth message:**

**The Atlantic Arc Commission asks that activation of the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) should be possible at multiregional request and no longer only national.** The aim would be for the EUSF to be activated as a result of a major climatic disaster affecting several European regions simultaneously without exceeding the national thresholds set by the EUSF.

The EUSF was set up in 2002 after serious floods affected central Europe, in order to provide financial aid to EU member states where major natural disasters cause direct damage of over 3 billion euros (at 2011 prices) or 0.6% of the gross national product of the affected country, whichever is lower. Following the revision of the regulation of 15 May 2014<sup>9</sup>, regional thresholds (at NUTS 2 level) were established in case of “regional natural disaster” for direct damage higher than 1.5% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the region concerned, which constitutes an achievement welcomed by the Atlantic Arc Commission. However, currently, the EUSF can only be activated at the request of a national government.

The Atlantic Arc Commission wishes to challenge European decision-makers over the fact that this mechanism does not reflect the reality of the coastal storms that the Atlantic regions have faced and continue to face.

Over the winter of 2013, three unusually intense storms in succession hit all the Atlantic coastal regions. Some affected regions (Spain and the UK in particular) asked their government to activate the EUSF, but their request was unsuccessful for various reasons: either because the amount of estimated damage came under the national threshold set by the EUSF, or because the storms hit too small a part of their territory, or indeed for other more political reasons (reluctance from the State to use this mechanism).

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<sup>8</sup> See note from the Atlantic Arc Commission voted in plenary in Umeå (24 September 2014): MRE: Sources of growth for the Atlantic Regions: [http://arcatlantique.org/pdf/doc\\_travail/690\\_en.pdf](http://arcatlantique.org/pdf/doc_travail/690_en.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Regulation (EU) No 661/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 amending regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 of the Council establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF): <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32014R0661>

Considering that climatic events do not distinguish between national boundaries and given the vulnerability of the Atlantic coastline, it seems crucial to us that European solidarity funding should be able to be dispensed fairly across all regions affected by the same disaster. To enable this to happen, **we are asking that it should be possible to declare a state of “European Natural Disaster” in order to trigger EUSF intervention in all regions affected** by a single climatic event.

Initially, several regions could unite to send a request to the European Commission combining the cost of damage in order to reach the threshold set by the Commission. In the longer term, the entire EUSF activation mechanism as well as the current thresholds could be reviewed in order to address the reality of extraordinary, yet increasingly violent and frequent climatic phenomena, especially on the Atlantic coast.

**Sixth message:**

**It is absolutely essential that the Atlantic Corridor and the North-Sea Mediterranean Corridor of the Trans European Transport Network (TEN-T) should be implemented for the existing part and complemented/improved to take into consideration the Regions that are not connected to them. The current routes of the corridors should better address current and future challenges for all the Atlantic Regions.**

This corridor was created There corridors were created without taking into account the actual circumstances of the Atlantic territories or their development prospects. The route map of the priority corridors was determined according to the criteria of volume and intensity of traffic flows with the aim of connecting three or more Member States and fails to represent the reality of traffic flows. This actually penalises countries or areas with low population density or more peripheral areas.

The current routes of the Atlantic Corridor and the North Sea – Mediterranean Corridor does not properly take into account the peripherality of the Atlantic Regions. Therefore it serves to increase the peripherality and remoteness of these Regions by distancing them from the centre of the EU and creating a break in terms of territorial cohesion, which is nevertheless an objective of the European Union.

The agreement with Canada<sup>10</sup> held out the prospect of increased trade and maritime transport between the European Atlantic ports and their Canadian counterparts. Similarly, the TTIP<sup>11</sup>, which is expected to multiply trade fold between Europe and the USA, will have a major effect on the Atlantic ports. This short-to-medium term increase in traffic should already have been prepared for by improving West-East rail links, to provide a suitable outlet for goods arriving at Atlantic ports. Better links between the ports and the Atlantic corridor must be given priority quickly and effectively in TEN-T policy.

Accessibility is an essential factor in attracting investors. If we want to develop the economies of these regions, it is essential for proper intra-European links to be established as quickly as possible, something that the current TEN-T maps for the Atlantic do not allow for as they stand.

For these reasons, we are asking the five Atlantic States, the European Commission and the European Parliament to schedule full and in-depth improvements to the map with regard to the Atlantic Corridor and North Sea – Mediterranean Corridor, in order to link up the ports of the Atlantic seaboard on the one hand, and the rest of the European network on the other and to improve the links between Ireland and the UK.

In addition, at a time when the European Commission and the European coordinator are preparing a review of the concept of Motorways of the Sea and their implementation, the Atlantic Regions will watch to ensure that the forthcoming mechanism is adapted to the characteristics - and the strengths – of their shared space. Within the Atlantic Arc, the maritime option offers a great potential for development if it is supported by sustainable European instruments.

<sup>10</sup> Accord Économique et Commercial Global (AECG) / Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) : [http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/ceta/index\\_fr.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/ceta/index_fr.htm)

<sup>11</sup> More information on TTIP : [http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/ttip/index\\_fr.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/ttip/index_fr.htm)

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## *Moving Forward*

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These **six messages constitute a plea to European decision-makers** to improve the way the existing European mechanisms for the Atlantic regions operate. The aim is to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion throughout the Atlantic Regions and to ensure strong economic recovery through a policy of targeted and effective investment.

This Final Declaration is also **proof of the commitment of the members of the Atlantic Arc Commission to greater visibility for Europe within the Atlantic territories**. The Atlantic Strategy can be an effective tool, as long as it receives political recognition and support from all levels of governance.

In order to make the Atlantic Strategy a reality and a success in the affected territories, consultation, discussion, alternative ideas and dialogue are all essential. As a platform for the regional authorities, the Atlantic Arc Commission plays the part of facilitator for dialogue between the regions and the European institutions

The Atlantic Arc Commission also has a role to play as a **“laboratory for ideas”**; by putting forward longer term proposals, the Atlantic Arc Commission shows its desire to see the European project progress. To achieve this, the Atlantic Arc Commission is committed to continuing its work proactively; seeking new emerging sectors such as blue biotechnology, the development of algoculture, deep sea mining, carbon capture and storage, etc.

Thanks to the strong commitment shown by our Regions, in constant contact with those on the ground, the Atlantic Arc Commission is - and will continue to be - perfectly placed to put forward firm proposals to European decision-makers in order to improve what we have today and plan effectively for tomorrow.

*Approved unanimously by the Atlantic Arc Commission*