



CPMR
**ATLANTIC ARC
COMMISSION**

Atlantic Arc Commission

Final Declaration Les Sables d'Olonne 2017

*Approved unanimously by the Annual General Meeting
of the Atlantic Arc Commission in Les Sables d'Olonne, 2 March 2017*

Messages from the Atlantic Arc Commission to European Policymakers

The Regions of the Atlantic Arc Commission (AAC) met in Les Sables d'Olonne (Pays de la Loire, France) on 2 and 3 March 2017 as part of the 28th Annual General Meeting of the Atlantic Arc Commission.

In the troubled context of a European Union in dispute, 2016 was most notably marked by the United Kingdom's "Brexit" vote. The year 2017 is also going to prove crucial since national elections in France and Germany could change the face of Europe.

At this Annual General Meeting, the Atlantic Arc Regions have wished to recall the message for unity contained within the fundamental principles of the CPMR which, since 1973, has been working for:

- Balanced territorial development throughout Europe,
- The promotion of solidarity within Europe and between its regions,
- Regional involvement in EU policy-making.

On behalf of its members, the CPMR's Atlantic Arc Commission wishes to convey the following messages:

Atlantic Strategy

Regarding the implementation of the Atlantic Maritime Strategy, the Atlantic Arc Commission:

1. **Insists** upon the need for the Atlantic Strategy to highlight concrete results by 2020 and calls on Member States as well as European institutions to identify clear funding for maritime projects in the Atlantic.
2. **Raises** the question of the United Kingdom's presidency of the Atlantic Strategy Group ("ASG" - made up of five Atlantic Member States and European institutions) in 2017. The Atlantic Arc Commission expresses some concern about the actual involvement of the United Kingdom in ensuring the success of the Atlantic Strategy in the territories in a context of high uncertainty about the United Kingdom's position in Europe following Brexit.
3. **Reaffirms** its commitment to transmit contributions to the ASG's work through its mirror "Atlantic Strategy" group, enabling an efficient transmission of information to the Atlantic Regions. Gives thanks for this to the Irish Presidency of 2016 for its cooperation with the Regions of the Atlantic Arc Commission.

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4. **Deeply regrets** the delay in implementing the Interreg Atlantic Area 2014-2020 programme. In March 2017, three years after the official start of the programming period, no project has yet been approved. This delay in committing funds leads to a significant risk of losing part of the 185 million euro budget due to the automatic decommitment rule.
5. **Requests** a renewed effort by all stakeholders (Member States, managing authority, European Commission, etc.) for this programme to increase its effectiveness and operational capability as soon as possible. The Regions of the Atlantic Arc Commission offer their assistance and support to avoid penalising the beneficiaries.
6. **Requests** a significantly increased budget for the Atlantic Area, whatever the new zoning of the Programme, whether with or without the United Kingdom, for the post-2020 period to:
 - Meet the expectations of Atlantic stakeholders that wish to implement projects for the operational development of the Atlantic maritime strategy;
 - Highlight the significant results achieved through good cooperation between actors along the Atlantic seaboard.
7. **Requests** that the simplification measures for managing the funds as planned within the scope of the mid-term review of EU policies can consider flexible financing rates to help projects in line with the Atlantic Strategy (e.g. bonus of 5%).
8. **Proposes** looking into the possibility of collaboration between the Atlantic Regions to raise the amounts required for each project (or group of projects) in order to access funding from the European Fund for Strategic Investments (Juncker Plan).
9. **Congratulates** DG Mare for the calls for projects launched as part of the "Integrated Maritime Policy" (IMP) component of the EMFF to unlock the blue growth potential in the maritime regions. The Atlantic Arc Commission calls in particular to renew and increase the budget for the call for "Blue Careers" projects which considers training needs across Europe's sea basins.

The Future of Europe

Concerning the discussions on the future of Europe, the Atlantic Arc Commission:

10. **Recalls** the ambition behind the founding of the Atlantic Arc Commission in 1989: to participate in a balanced development of the Atlantic Regions and promote an ambitious vision of the European project.
11. **Recalls** that the CPMR and Atlantic Arc Commission support the British regions that want to find ways to continue their participation in the European project and calls for solidarity, as mentioned in the [Final Declaration of the CPMR](#) adopted in Ponta Delgada (Azores, Portugal) in November 2016. The Atlantic Arc Commission will pay specific attention to the cross-border challenges between member regions and the united kingdom.
12. **Affirms** its interest in contributing to the activities of the CPMR regarding the future of Europe and notes the approach proposed by the CPMR in the document "The CPMR and the future of Europe" to be presented to the CPMR Political Bureau in Gozo (Malta) on 10 March 2017 in partnership with the Maltese EU Presidency. In this respect, the Atlantic Arc Commission has set up a Brexit task force to share and broadcast available information in order to play an influential role in the institutional debates.

13. **Calls on** EU institutions to pay special attention to those particularly important issues for the Atlantic Regions, as explained in our notes on "[The Impact of Brexit in the Regions of the Atlantic Arc Commission](#)".
14. **Hopes** to continue a constructive dialogue with the younger generations. The Annual General Meeting in Les Sables d'Olonne is a first step toward this with a class from the Lycée Maritime Eric Tabarly taking part. The Atlantic Arc Commission will continue its commitment to young people thanks to the European project "*A Blue Biotechnology Master for a Blue Career*" prepared as part of the "Innovation" working group, which aims to create a Masters course on blue biotechnology at the University of La Rochelle.
15. **Calls** for an in-depth reflection on the future of Europe based on concrete evidence highlighting the benefits of good cooperation for the Atlantic Regions.
16. **Reiterates** the CPMR's call in favour of a stronger post-2020 cohesion policy for all European regions, as set out in the final declaration of the 44th CPMR general assembly. This policy will have to combine direct aid and financial instruments, putting the regions at the core of decision-making processes. we recall that cohesion policy related investments must be excluded from stability pact calculations.

Fisheries and Aquaculture

Regarding issues related to Fishing and Aquaculture, the Atlantic Arc Commission:

17. **Recalls** that the President of the Atlantic Arc Commission brought to the attention of the European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Mr Karmenu Vella, the proposals but also the concerns of the Atlantic Arc Regions at a high-level meeting on 7 December 2016 in Brussels.
18. **Calls** on European institutions not to take the EMFF as an adjustment variable in future negotiations between the EU and the UK. The Atlantic Arc Commission hopes that special attention be paid to Atlantic stock management. It is crucial to avoid any imbalances that may prove harmful as much for British fishermen as for European fishermen operating in the area.
19. **Regrets** the delay in the EMFF 2014-2020 implementation, due both to delays in the adoption of the EMFF Regulation 508/2014 at European level by the Council and Parliament and internal delays within each member state in the development and launch of the Operational Programmes,
20. **Calls** for a simplification of the EMFF management methods to accelerate its implementation. This simplification is necessary both for managing authorities and end-users. For the period post 2020, the Atlantic Arc Commission wants all European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)¹ to be able to have the same management arrangements,
21. **Invites**, to this end, the Commission to prepare a Memorandum or guidelines on the simplification and regionalisation of ESI Funds implementation by the end of 2017, with strong emphasis on the need for Member States to choose similar management methods for these funds.
22. **Requests** an urgent two-year moratorium on the discards ban in the Atlantic to allow for the completion of major socio-economic impact studies pinpointing clear

¹ European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) currently include the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Fund for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (EMFF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the Cohesion Fund (CF).

recommendations together with funding to prevent significant losses of revenue for professional fishermen. This transition phase will also enable an adaptation of port facilities, which in their current state cannot cope with the obligation to land all catches.

23. **Encourages** stronger dialogue between the fishing industry, scientists and institutional representatives to better prepare the setting of annual quotas, in particular insofar as Atlantic stocks are doing well. These discussions should help to avoid situations of tension like in December 2016, for example, where the Commission proposed a drastic reduction in sea bass fishing quotas in the Atlantic.
24. **Requests** for the post-2020 period to adapt the future Maritime and Fisheries Fund taking on board the following aspects, identified in the ongoing CPMR study on the implementation of the EMFF (2014-2020):
 - Building a more effective governance (e.g. aligning management arrangements with those of other ESI Funds),
 - Allowing greater flexibility (e.g. merging measures to maximize their impact),
 - Resolving problems of interpretation of certain measures of the EMFF that make its application too heavy and complex,
 - Changing the scope of the EMFF Regulations to better fit the realities of the territories.

Transport and accessibility:

On European transport policy, the Atlantic Arc Commission:

25. **Supports** the Written Declaration 0129/2016 of the European Parliament on the need for the TEN-T to support regional accessibility and **recalls** the following elements:
 - Article 4 of Regulation 1315/2013 on the Union's guidelines for the development of the Trans-European Transport Network indicates that this network must ensure accessibility for all regions and a balanced coverage of the European territory.
 - Since 2014, the implementation of this Regulation has failed to achieve this goal: over 90% of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) funds were allocated only to projects located along the nine priority corridors
 - The Regions which are not situated on these Corridors benefited far too marginally from the opportunities offered by the TEN-T and the CEF.
 - In addition, they have more difficulty in accessing funds made available under the Juncker Plan which gives priority to large-scale projects with a fast return on investment.
 - The Commission is asked to pay special attention to covering the entire territory of the Union in the implementation of TEN-T and CEF by the end of the 2014-2020 programme period, in accordance with the principle of territorial cohesion.
26. **Regrets that** 86% of the CEF has already been used by calls in 2014 and 2015 and **requests** therefore that the Commission gives more attention to a balanced geographical allocation of the remaining funds, in particular for the benefit of peripheral projects.
27. **Proposes** as such that beyond the "European added value", a new selection criterion be adopted that considers the "peripheral added value" which would highlight the connection needs of the regions which are not situated on the corridors.

28. **Will contribute to** the mid-term review of the CEF by the end of 2017, under Article 27 of the CEF Regulation, particularly by drawing up amendment proposals to its Appendix 1 relating to priority projects to be financed in connection with the priorities of our Regions.
29. **Requests** that the post-2020 CEF should be endowed with a solid budget capable of financing small or large core infrastructures that respond to territorial needs and generate growth and non-relocatable jobs in the Atlantic Arc Regions.
30. **Wants** a new financing tool dedicated to grey areas not covered by European Corridors for the post 2020 period.
31. **Supports** the concrete proposals made by the CPMR on the content of the amendments to be made to the current CEF Regulation in its policy note presented to the Political Bureau in Gozo (Malta) on 10 March 2017 entitled "[Review of the CEF post-2020](#)".
32. **Requests** an official meeting with the European coordinators of the Atlantic and North Sea-Mediterranean corridors to discuss the implementation of infrastructure projects along the Atlantic seaboard, with a consideration of the maritime connections via the motorways of the sea, with all the Regions concerned, whether or not these are located along these two corridors.

Maritime industries and Renewable Marine Energy

Regarding maritime industries and renewable marine energy, the Atlantic Arc Commission:

33. **Highlights** the potential for major economic development linked to the development of marine energy in the Atlantic and **recalls** that the European Union is now the world industrial leader in this field.
34. **Will continue** its commitment to developing marine energy along the entire Atlantic seaboard, via:
 - Participation in the initiative led by DG MARE as part of the European Skills Agenda² to feed back the needs for training and mobility in the maritime industries and marine energy sector as defined by the Leadership 2020 report³,
 - Facilitating discussions between the Regions and economic stakeholders in the Atlantic and North Sea involved in the management of offshore wind farms by organising field visits for officials and technicians from both relevant geographical commissions by the end of 2017,
 - Facilitating discussions between regions and organisations representing marine energy industries at European level. The Atlantic Arc Commission will contribute to the partnership between the CPMR and the technology platform ETIP Oceans coordinated by Ocean Energy Europe.
 - Supporting the regions in creating awareness and social acceptability in order to develop marine renewable energies in a concerted manner with maritime stakeholders and people living near the facilities.
35. **Calls on** the EU to strongly assert its ambitions to develop marine energy as part of its energy policy. It will be necessary in this regard to assess the scope which must be given to the principle of technological neutrality within the framework of the regulations of the "Energy" package proposed by the European Commission in September 2016.

² <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=fr>

³ http://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/maritime/shipbuilding/ec-support_fr

In relation to environmental and climate themes, the Atlantic Arc Commission:

36. **Welcomes** wholeheartedly the creation of a "Climate" Task Force within the CPMR following the General Assembly of the Azores in November 2016 and affirms the commitment of the Atlantic Arc Commission Regions to be involved in its future work.
37. **Wants** to initiate enhanced cooperation between the Atlantic Regions concerning the sustainable planning and protection of coastal areas. The Atlantic Arc Commission will focus its action on issues such as:
 - Integrated coastal zone management and marine spatial planning through the SIMNORAT project, led by SHOM (Naval Hydrographic and Oceanographic Service) and funded by DG Mare under the EMFF. The Atlantic Arc Commission will ensure that the Regions are involved in the work of SIMNORAT, which aims to contribute to the implementation of the Marine Spatial Planning Directive.
 - The risks linked to the rising sea level, the receding coastline, and the salinisation of estuaries. These actions will be based on discussions between the Regions, their local authorities and regional research institutes.