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Dear Members,

On the threshold of the annual Atlantic Arc Commission’s General Assembly for which we are looking forward to welcoming all of you in San Sebastian in May 2022, this moment marks the end of the 2020-2022 term of the Basque Country presidency of the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission, allowing us a time of retrospective on the ambitions we set together two years ago. This term was shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, which despite a unique context of restrictions that highly transformed our daily lives, proved the great capacity of the Atlantic Arc Commission members to adapt and remain at the forefront to represent our regional voices at the European level on many crucial dossiers for the Atlantic.

The first priority we worked together on was to make the most of new EU instruments and EU policies linked with the Green Deal for the benefit of the Atlantic Regions’ common challenges. This year, the Atlantic Arc Commission engaged many actions to monitor and influence the development of various EU programmes connecting with our interests. In the pivotal time of the revision of the Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies for 2021-2027, the Atlantic Arc Commission has been an essential platform to seek synergies between us on research and innovation. It has also alarmed the European Commission on the need to support more Offshore Renewable Energies in the Horizon Europe work programme 2023-2024. In light of our ambitions to impulse the development and implementation of the Atlantic Maritime Strategy and its Action Plan 2.0, the Atlantic Arc Commission was crucial to maintain the representation of regions in the governance. We managed to spread the concept of flagship projects, to deliver the ambitions of the Atlantic Strategy. We supported the involvement of regional stakeholders in the Atlantic Strategy Pillar Task Forces. We also successfully participated in the implementation of Pillar I “Ports as Hub of the Blue Economy” and Pillar IV “Healthy Ocean and Resilient Coasts” by developing with a consortium of Atlantic partners the AspBAN project and extending CleanAtlantic project. We seized many opportunities to gain visibility, organising and participating to high-level events at EU level and international levels. We re-established contacts with key Atlantic neighbouring regions and found many commonalities in our ambitions, giving encouraging prospects for the future of our network.

I would like to address the remarkable steps taken towards the creation of an Atlantic macro-regional maritime Strategy this year. More than ever, our joint efforts triggered a revamped interest for the initiative at Member States and EU level. Through high-level meetings, connections with member states, collaboration with the European Parliament and other EU Institutions, we have produced and used the right tools and mechanisms to get even closer to our objective to see the Council giving mandate to the European Commission to develop an Atlantic Macro-Region.

In this promising atmosphere for the future of the Atlantic, I wish to warmly thank all the Atlantic Arc Commission members for your constant dedication to shape a joint sustainable and innovative future for the Atlantic and look forward to continuing this cooperation.

Iñigo Urkullu,
President of the Atlantic Arc Commission and President of the Basque Government
MEMBER REGIONS

Associated partners:
Atlantic Cities,
RTA-ATN,
AC3A
ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE
of the Atlantic Arc Commission

President
General Assembly
1st Vice-President
Steering Group
Executive Secretariat

Atlantic Cooperation
- Atlantic Strategy
- Exploration of the Atlantic Macro-Region
- Cooperation with non EU Regions
- Brexit Task Force

Maritime
- Innovation
- Marine Renewable Energies
- Fisheries/Aquaculture
- Ocean Pollution

Attractivity
- Transport
- Tourism & Culture
The AAC proposal for an Atlantic Macro-Regional Strategy: getting closer to a Council’s Mandate

Political priority: Create an Atlantic Macro-Region and implement the Atlantic Sea-basin Strategy

General Successes:

- Support from the European Parliament in favour of an Atlantic Macro-Regional Strategy and agreement of France, Spain and Portugal to assess the benefits of creating a Macro-Region, established on November 5, 2021 in Lisbon.
- Influence and active role in the governance of the Atlantic Strategy via the participation of the AAC Secretariat to the Atlantic Strategy Committee

A joint approach to promote the Atlantic Macro-Region towards Atlantic Member States

On the occasion of the AAC General Assembly of June 09, 2021, the Atlantic Arc Commission kicked-off this second year of the Basque Country Government’s term with an ambitious high-level conference on the Atlantic Macro-Region, which was also featured as a side-event of the Ministerial Conference of the Portuguese Presidency of the EU Council. This meeting gathered two Atlantic Secretaries of States with the participation of Juan González Barba (Spain), Isabel Ferreira (Portugal) and MEP Younous Omarjee, a firm ally at the European Parliament for the promotion of the creation of the Atlantic Macro-Region, and Normunds Popens, Deputy Director General at DG REGIO. Not only was the conference a chance for AAC Member Regions to discuss the proposal and recall the key messages of the Political Declaration voted in December 2020, but this moment also gave the opportunity for the two Secretaries of Spain from Spain and Portugal to express their explicit support to the creation of an Atlantic Macro-Region. This discussion eventually nurtured Juan
González Barba’s reflection on the topic as he proposed the creation of the Atlantic Macro-Region at the General Affairs Council on June 22, 2021.

In the continuity of the Atlantic Arc Commission’s work, the Secretaries of State for European Affairs of Spain, France, and Portugal met in Lisbon, on November 05, 2021, to discuss shared priorities with the aim of strengthening close cooperation and preparing together for the next European deadlines. On this occasion, they adopted a joint declaration proposing to assess the benefits of the creation of an Atlantic Macro-Region.

Both as a driving force and an actor of this revamped interest in the Atlantic Macro-Region, the Atlantic Arc Commission seized the momentum of the French Presidency of the EU Council to engage with the cabinet of Clément Beaune, French Secretary for European Affairs, on March 15, 2022.

The AAC delegation was composed of María Ángeles Elorza Zubiría, Presidency of the Atlantic Arc Commission and Secretary General for Exterior Actions for Basque Country, Teresa Almeida, Vice-President of the Atlantic Arc Commission and President of Lisbon and Tagus Valley Region, Mathieu Bergé, Regional Councillor for Nouvelle-Aquitaine in charge of ports and European territorial cooperation, and Katja Kruger, Regional Councillor for Brittany Region. Together, they shared the added value of creating an Atlantic Maritime Macro-Region with highlights on the importance of cooperation on Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3), the need of a more structured cooperation in identified sectors, and on the perimeter envisaged for this macro-region. Thanks to these exchanges, further steps for collaboration have been agreed with the Cabinet of the French Secretary for European Affairs and a technical paper has been developed on their request in April 2022.
A decisive collaboration with the European Parliament

Throughout this year, the Atlantic Arc Commission has followed and supported the development of MEP Younous Omarjee’s report “A new approach to the Atlantic maritime strategy”, and defended the inclusion of the creation of an Atlantic Macro-Region. The AAC actively engaged with the shadow-rapporteurs and Committees in charge of drafting opinions to convince them to support the proposal to create an Atlantic Macro-Region, which was at threat in the negotiations. On 14 September 2021, the report was adopted by the European Parliament with an overwhelming majority. This report marked a crucial step for the Atlantic Macro-Regional Strategy: since September 2021, the initiative is officially supported by the European Parliament, drawing important attention on the Atlantic Macro-Regional Strategy at the EU level. In this promising context, the AAC gathered for its Plenary meeting in October 2021, which enabled regions to update each other on their respective actions on their national governments. MEP Younous Omarjee, present on that day called the regions to seize the vote of the European Parliament as an argument to further strengthen the legitimacy of the request for a mandate for the creation of the Atlantic Macro-Regional Strategy.

Collaboration with the European Parliament has also been highly valued in the context of the meeting with the French Secretary for European Affairs. As a follow-up of this discussion, Renew Europe MEPs Catherine Chabaud, Laurence Farreng, Valérie Hayer, Pierre Karleskind, Marie-Pierre Vedrenne and Stéphanie Yon-Courtin co-signed a letter addressed to Clément Beaune, expressing their support to the creation of the Atlantic Macro-Regional Strategy, with highlights to the CPMR contribution and report of MEP Younous Omarjee. This letter has been sent out in March 2022 and enabled to strengthen the influence of the AAC proposal at French national level.

“"The European Parliament is the first of the three EU institutions to call for the creation of an Atlantic Macro-Region. By this strong and timely vote for the Atlantic, we are asking for a better integration of regions in the governance, more synergies between funds, and more capacity to develop Atlantic projects."

Younous Omarjee
Member of the European Parliament, Chair of REGI Committee

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atlantic-arc.org
Seizing all the opportunities to promote our vision

In addition to core policy actions, the Atlantic Arc Commission mobilised its Secretariat and Members for full dissemination and influence of the AAC ambitions for an Atlantic Macro-Region through an active involvement in key events and discussions. The AAC has been engaging in different levels notably at the “One Ocean Summit” organised by the French Presidency of the EU Council, but also at EU, national and transnational levels to share its vision.

The AAC particularly engaged with other Atlantic organisations to promote its proposal for an Atlantic Maritime Macro-Region. On September 28, 2021, the AAC was invited to participate in the RTA-ATN orientation committee. On November 19, 2021, les CESER de l’Atlantique, the association gathering Economic, Social and Environmental Councils of French Atlantic regions, organised an event to discuss ways of strengthening interregional cooperation.

Mathieu Bergé, Regional Councillor of Nouvelle-Aquitaine, gave a powerful statement on the benefits of an Atlantic Macro-Region. As a conclusion, a dedicated working group to reflect on the role of civil society in an Atlantic Macro-Regional Strategy was being set up. Following on from this meeting, on December 15, 2021, AAC Executive Secretary Elise Wattrelot was auditioned by the new working group to present the AAC Macro-Regional vision, actions carried out and future steps. On May 2021 and 2022, the AAC was invited to the European Regions for Smart Communities Summit in Alentejo to present the advancements on the Atlantic Macro-Region.

“To better protect the ocean, we need an institutional framework of greater political influence. That framework, as the Atlantic Arc has politically declared, is a Macro-Region. We want to evolve towards a macro-regional strategy that integrates our marine identity and that also ensures that activities develop on land do not harm our coast”

Maria Angeles Elorza Zubiria
Secretary General for External Action, Basque Government, at the One Ocean Summit in Brest, February 2022
The Atlantic Strategy: Coming back on the first year of collaboration in the framework of the AAP 2.0

As an associated member of the Atlantic Strategy Committee (ASC), the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission pursued its mission to promote regional representation in this new framework and facilitate coordination between the ASC and AAC Member Regions. In this first year of implementation, marked by the Irish Presidency in 2021 and Spanish Presidency since January 2022, the AAC participated in the four meetings of the Atlantic Strategy Committees in June 2021, September 2021, November 2021 and March 2022. These regular meetings enabled the AAC Secretariat to monitor the development of the implementation of the AAP 2.0, identify opportunities for regions to engage in the Strategy, but also to present its ambitions towards the Atlantic Macro-Region and encourage ideas of Atlantic flagship projects. This commitment eventually resulted in the opening of the first call for projects dedicated to the Atlantic Strategy on Pillar I, funded by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, which gave the birth of the AspBAN project, of which the AAC is a partner.

In addition to the AAC Secretariat’s role as an associated member to the Atlantic Strategy Committee, the Atlantic Arc Commission has also been well represented across the AAP 2.0 thanks to a coordinated work to include AAC regional representatives in the AAP 2.0 Pillars’ Task Forces, namely:

- **Donegal County Council and Brittany Region** for Pillar I “Ports as gateways and hubs for the blue economy”
- **Nouvelle Aquitaine Region** with the participation of the University of La Rochelle in Pillar II “Skills and Ocean Literacy”
- **The Basque Energy Agency, Asturias Foundation for Energy (FAEN) and AAC Secretariat** for Pillar III “Marine Renewable Energy”
- **Alentejo Region** for Pillar IV “Healthy Oceans and Resilient Coasts”

Through the regions’ involvement in these Task Forces, they have directly supported the Pillar Coordinators and contributed to define the strategy and specific tasks for implementation.
At the Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Conference in October 2021, the Atlantic Arc Commission was granted the organisation of a workshop together with the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO). The workshop “Perspectives on Green Ports of the Future” gathered experts coming from the ports sector, private companies operating in ports, regional and national governments for them to present their different perspectives on Green ports of the future. With the participation of Mathieu Bergé, Councillor of Nouvelle Aquitaine Region and Sr Ramón Muñoz-Calero, Director of Avilés Port (Asturias), the event registered the highest number of attendees for the 2021 edition, contributed to the definition of the Pillar I work programme.

The first year coming to an end, the Atlantic Assistance Mechanism published its first implementation report to monitor the development of the AAP 2.0. In this document, several AAC activities are highlighted, among them the Atlantic Awards winning projects CleanAtlantic and AspBAN identified as examples of good practice.

Aligned with the conclusions of this report, which is now calling to take concrete actions, the AAC will reiterate the importance to define concrete flagship projects within the ASC and Pillar task forces and connect them with funding opportunities. The AAC will keep its ambition to act as a bridge with Atlantic regions for full implementation of the Strategy at regional level.

- AspBAN, winner of the Atlantic Projects Awards 2021 under the category “Ports as gateways and hubs of the Blue Economy”
- CleanAtlantic, winner of the Atlantic Projects Awards 2021 under the category “Healthy and Resilient Coasts”

“Regional representation at the Atlantic Strategy level is important for extending outreach to stakeholders and to implement the ambitions of the strategy at local level. The CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission was an active participant in the Atlantic Strategy Committee throughout the Irish Presidency of the Atlantic Strategy. Its constructive contribution to the four pillars’ objectives was very welcome, productive and beneficial to both the strategy and the Committee.”

Dymphna Keogh
First Secretary of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Presidency of the Atlantic Strategy 2021
Monitoring the Interreg Atlantic Area Programme 2021-2027

Following the developments of the future of the Interreg Atlantic Area Programme has been a key priority for the Atlantic Arc Commission this year. The INTERREG Atlantic Area 2021-2027 programme will correspond to a budget of EUR 113 million from the ERDF, a slight decrease compared to the 2014-2021 period, mainly due to the withdrawal of the UK. The co-financing rate for projects approved has been set up to 75% of the total investment. Priorities of investment will focus on Blue innovation and competitiveness, Blue Environment and Blue sustainable and social tourism and culture. A fourth priority will focus on Better governance for Atlantic Cooperation, a brand new priority which should notably be used to improve the coordination between the Atlantic strategy. These first insights reflect well the position of the AAC that have been disseminated on many occasions and notably through a public consultation launched by the programme, earlier in March 2021. From now on, the Atlantic Arc Commission will monitor the publication of the new programme and seek further opportunities to align funding with the Atlantic Strategy objectives.

In the meantime, the Atlantic Arc Commission seized the opportunity of the Extension Call 3 launched by the programme to extend projects from last programming period for additional activities and capitalisation actions. On all the applications to the call in which the AAC participated in, 100% of them were successful, offering new occasions to collaborate until June 2023 through:

- The **CleanAtlantic Project**, fighting against marine litter in the Atlantic;
- The **SAFER project**, enabling transfer of innovative technology in the seafood sector;
- The **FANBEST+ project**, improving the technology transfer strategies to SMEs of the Blue Economy.
The Atlantic Arc Commission has been at the forefront of the reflection on the future of cooperation with non-EU countries. Under the leadership of the Welsh Government, the AAC developed the Technical Paper “Rethinking Cooperation after Brexit: Involvement on non-EU countries in EU programmes” benchmarking the experiences of other CPMR non-EU regions. This paper especially focused its analysis on the Horizon Europe, Erasmus+ and Interreg programmes to seek opportunities for cooperation within the programme legal frameworks and other initiatives. The benchmark enabled to identify avenues of work to explore to cooperate with non-EU members. It notably illustrates how a participation in a macro-regional strategies or intergovernmental framework could support cooperation at interregional level with the UK regions and nations.

As a follow-up of this note and with the support of the Welsh Government, the AAC supported the European Parliament in the development of a Pilot Project “transatlantic cooperation scheme to deliver the Green deal locally”.

This pilot project received a very good evaluation from the European Commission and Terms of References are currently being prepared. This project represents a strategic opportunity for the AAC to shape new relations between regions from both side of the Atlantic and export their savoir-faire for a greener future at global and local levels.

In addition to inventing new modes of cooperation with UK regions, the AAC was active in influencing the negotiation on the Brexit Adjustment Reserve. With the support of the CPMR Secretariat, it directly influenced the proposal of the European Commission, as well as the report of the European Parliament, to ensure a secure and adequate involvement of regional authorities and reinforce the territorial focus. The AAC also collaborated on many occasions with the Committee of the Regions to assess the effects of Brexit on regions and support the maintain of cooperation with UK regions and nations.

“Transatlantic cooperation is essential in Europe. It strengthens the momentum towards a transatlantic macro-region. This pilot projects aims to initiate the first local projects for the ecological transition. It is the fruit of the good cooperation we have with the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission to rethink the future of the Atlantic Strategy. I was happy to initiate this pilot project which is important to support cooperation in the Atlantic and give the ambition it deserves.”

Younous Omarjee
Chair of the REGI Committee, European Parliament
Connecting with other Atlantic Regions

Throughout this past year, the Atlantic Arc Commission organised several discussions with non-CPMR regions in the Atlantic, which resulted in fruitful exchanges.

In November 2021, the CPMR and AAC Presidencies met together with Portuguese Regions in Lisbon to discuss regional cooperation. The meeting hosted by President of CCDR Lisboa e Vale do Tejo and AAC Vice-President Teresa Almeida gathered CPMR President Cees Loggen, CPMR General Secretary CCDR Alentejo President António Ceia da Silva, as well as non-CPMR regions representatives: Centro Vice-President Eduardo Anselmo Castro and Algarve Vice-President José Pacheco.

This meeting revealed common concerns and visions for the future, notably on potential synergies on climate change adaptation, depopulation, and cohesion issues, with highlights on the Atlantic Macro-Region. Interesting prospects for cooperation within the CPMR framework were raised.

The Atlantic Arc Commission also re-established contact with Québec, Canada, to discuss their means of collaboration with the EU as a work of the Cooperation with non-EU members Working Group.
MARITIME CHALLENGES

The AAC at the forefront to boost regions’ cooperation in maritime sectors

Political priorities:
- Make the most of EU Funding; enhance AAC political visibility on maritime issues; implement the Atlantic Strategy

General successes:
- High level conference on Atlantic Offshore Renewable Energy to level up the profile of the Atlantic as test bed for offshore renewable energy deployment
- Concept of cooperation on Blue RIS3 at Atlantic level developed by the AAC has contributed to the European Commission’ reflection on the creation of a new EU platform to develop Blue Projects.
- Development of Maritime transnational projects in line with AAC political orientations, including many regional stakeholders
- New visibility at international levels through collaborations with organisations such as UNEP and OSPAR
- Close coordination with Atlantic Strategy Pillars to support the implementation of the Atlantic sea-basin strategy.

Mapping Atlantic synergies

Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3) are essential regional strategic plans to fund innovative solutions in sectors of importance for the regional development. As the Atlantic Arc Commission member regions are deeply reliant on maritime-related activities, strengthening common work on Blue Smart Specialisation Strategies has been a key priority of this year in the timely moment of their revision for the programming period 2021-2027.
The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat conducted an analysis of draft revisions of the Atlantic RIS3s, with the aim to identify commonalities and thus areas of potential cooperation. The analysis showed that Atlantic regions have many RIS3 in common and have chosen continuity and prioritisation of their RIS3 compared to the previous programming period, which means that possibilities to cooperate on R&D together are numerous, especially in blue sectors.

At the premises of this note, the Atlantic Arc Commission organised the workshop “Blue Economy and RIS3, fostering Innovation in the Atlantic Area” at the European Week of the Regions and Cities in October 2021, with the impulse of the Region of Lisboa e Vale do Tejo. The workshop, moderated by MEP Manuel Pizarro, tackled the RIS3 of Atlantic regions and the identification of further cooperation opportunities for innovative projects and new businesses related to the Blue Economy in the presence of Teresa Almeida, President of CCDR Lisboa e Vale do Tejo, Claire Hugues, Vice President of Pays de la Loire Region, Karl Bonner from Donegal County Council, Olatz Ajuria from the Basque Energy Agency, and Tiago Pitta e Cunha, CEO of the Oceano Azul Foundation.

FANBEST+: the Support from a EU project to consolidate S3 cooperation

This work of consolidation of RIS3 cooperation in the Atlantic is embedded in the activities performed throughout the FANBEST project, which the AAC is a partner of since 2022 and until June 2023.

FANBEST is co-funded by the Interreg Atlantic Area programme and aims at fostering technology transfer to SMEs in blue sectors by creating a network of public and private entities focused on the fund raising that make possible the start and scale-up phase, so that the technologies and innovations “made in Atlantic regions” can reach the market turned into successful business projects. In this framework, the AAC is entitled to perform a study on the Atlantic Area RIS3 2021-27, Workshops and Peer-learning meetings, and Policy Recommendations to EU Institutions.
Proactive engagement in the definition of the relevant EU tools supporting RIS3 collaboration

The Atlantic Arc Commission has been proactive in facilitating exchanges and collaboration with the European Commission in the perspective of harnessing the benefits of new funding opportunities enabling a cooperation on RIS3. From the AAC collaborated with DG REGIO on the implementation of the Interregional Innovation Investment tool (i3).

The Atlantic Arc Commission has also actively cooperated with DG MARE on the creation of a Blue S3 Platform, and reflected on the potential services which could be borne by the future Platform such as capacity building activities to create partnership for I3 calls, sharing knowledge on existing projects on S3 cooperation, developing indicative scenarios of investment needs to help regions to identify what should be earmarked in their S3 or supporting to common procedure to allow regions to evaluate the impact of their S3 on blue sectors. The AAC will keep on monitoring the development of the Blue Platform and share insights with the European Commission.

“Regions are at the cornerstone of the future of their Smart Specialization Strategies for 2021-2027. Cooperation and synergies will be crucial for the Atlantic Area to become a fertile ground for innovation and research in Blue Economy. The AAC is a platform for our regions to shape instruments that will leverage common projects in Research and Innovation in regional strategic sectors such as maritime sectors.”

Maria Teresa Mourão de Almeida
President of the CCDR de Lisboa e Vale do Tejo,
Vice-President of the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission
Marine Renewable Energies: our vision for an EU leadership of the Atlantic

Joining our political forces to tap in the full potential of the Atlantic

More than ever before considering the current geopolitical context in Europe, the Atlantic Arc Commission engaged stronger collaboration to recognise on Offshore Renewable Energy in the Atlantic, acknowledging the need for greater energy autonomy for Atlantic countries and the EU objective to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

Seizing the opportunity of the WindEurope Annual Conference held in Bilbao, Spain, the Atlantic Arc Commission co-organised a high-level conference on Marine Renewable Energies together with the Basque Energy Agency (EVE) on April 04, 2022.

The Atlantic regions discussed their ambitions and plans to deploy Offshore Renewable Energies and met with representatives of the sector of the wind energy, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Investment Bank on means to make the Atlantic area a pillar on Europe’s energy autonomy from Russia, as set up in the REPower EU Communication, while achieving the Green deal.

In order to explicitly frame their common vision on the topic and promote their ambitions, this event climaxed with the adoption of a political declaration notably calling for:

- The recognition of the geopolitical and strategic importance to develop Offshore Renewable Energy in the Atlantic;
- Efficient multi-level governance in energy is for deployment of industrial value-chains supporting new offshore renewable energy farms;
- Simplification of permitting procedure to reach the international objectives on time;
- Facilitation of access to funding for Offshore Renewable Energies projects at the early stage of development;
- Respect the marine ecosystem and its diversity and request appropriate support for citizens’ assemblies at local level to foster social acceptance of MRE projects;
Complementarily, the AAC also took action by sending a letter to Commissioners Gabriel, Simson, Sinkevicius, calling for a higher share of funding for Marine Renewable Energies in the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2023-2024.

Cooperating with Atlantic stakeholders on Offshore Renewable Energy Skills

In order to further concretise our work on Marine Renewable Energies, the AAC engaged in different initiatives to connect with other stakeholders willing to work on the development of the future skills for the deployment of Offshore Renewables.

Developing a project on Offshore Renewable Energy Skills

Thanks to its participation in the Pact For Skills on Offshore Renewable Energy, the Atlantic Arc Commission joined in March 2022 a consortium led by CETMAR to submit a proposal of project for the Erasmus+ call "Partnerships for Innovation - Forward Looking Projects" 2022. If approved, the FLORES project (Forward Looking at the Offshore Renewables will promote the core activity of the Large-scale partnership launching the Pact for Skills in the Offshore Renewable Energies (ORE) sector).
Fisheries: Supporting innovation in the seafood value chain

The SAFER project, co-funded by the Interreg Atlantic Area programme, fuels the activities of the AAC Fisheries Working Group. The SAFER project aims at improving the innovation performance of the seafood sector by increasing technology adoption and transnational cooperation for a smart growth of the sector. Successfully applying for the Interreg Atlantic Area Extension Call, the project has been extended until June 2023.

On the occasion of the CPMR Working Group on Fisheries on September 20, 2021, the Atlantic Arc Commission organised a political conference of the project. The CPMR regions got the chance to discover the outcomes of the projects, which implemented several technology pilots across the Atlantic, and to share best practice examples from the different CPMR sea-basins but also to address common challenges of the regions to modernize the sector.

In this context, the AAC organised a discussion with key experts from DG MARE, the European Institute for Innovation and Technology (EIT food) and a representative from the Atlantic Strategy to tackle future scenarios and opportunities to boost innovation in the seafood sector for maritime and coastal regions, with a specific focus on concrete opportunities for regions to build cooperation projects.

For the extension period, the AAC is notably entitled to develop a policy toolkit on Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3) for the seafood sector.

“\nIn a double context of COVID-19 and Brexit which puts further pressure on the seafood sector, reflecting on the future of the sector became even more crucial [...] Research and Innovation transfer in the whole value chain will require a multi-level governance to ensure its competitiveness and sustainability.\n”

Claire Hugues
Vice-President of the Pays de la Loire Region and Chair of the CPMR Fisheries Working Group
Ocean pollution: a first year under the sign of common engagement and international visibility for the Atlantic Arc

During last year Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly of June 2021, one of the main outcomes of the day was the creation of a new AAC working group on Ocean Pollution, initiated, and piloted by Norte Region, Portugal.

In its first year running, the AAC Ocean Working Group kicked off on the international stage. On October 1, 2021, Antonio M. Cunha, President of CCDR do Norte, participated at the OSPAR Inter-Ministerial Meeting, backed by the CPMR observer status at the convention. He presented the AAC Pollution Working Group and made a powerful statement voicing the importance of including regions and local communities in the fight against ocean pollution. In the final Ministerial Declaration adopted during the meeting, regions were thus recognized as key interlocutors for a strong and transparent cooperation on marine pollution.

Successful Extension of CleanAtlantic project now recognized as flagship project of Atlantic strategy pillar IV

Throughout this year, the Ocean Working Group worked on the definition of its working plan to reach the objectives identified at the time of the creation of the group. Among the activities foreseen, the AAC has been working on the development of the Pledge in favour of a Clean Atlantic Ocean, to be signed by the 14 Atlantic Member Regions at the AAC General Assembly of May 2022. This document will mark a first step in the definition and promotion of the common ambitions of the AAC to fight against ocean pollution in the Atlantic together.

The actions of the working group are embedded in the activities performed in the context of our participation to the CleanAtlantic project. The CleanAtlantic project, co-funded by the Interreg Atlantic
In 2021, the AAC has coordinated several meetings with the UN Environmental Programme to seek synergies between the CleanAtlantic Knowledge Tool, in which the AAC also actively contributed, and their GPML Digital Platform. The AAC also facilitated joint work with the CPMR North Sea Commission on river modelling at the conference Waste Free Rivers, organised on June 24, 2021.

In 2021, the project won the Atlantic Project Awards at the Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Conference under the category “Healthy and Resilient Oceans”. For its extension until June 2023, the Atlantic Arc Commission will develop a regional toolkit to support the implementation of measures against marine litter based on the outcomes of the project, among other capitalisation activities.

“The Atlantic Ocean knows neither regional nor member states borders, and we must act like it. Regional cooperation is essential to tackle ocean pollution effectively, with a holistic approach. This first year of implementation of the Ocean Pollution Working Group showed the importance of the on-field knowledge and competencies of regions to shape and implement measures for a sustainable future of our Ocean.”

António M. Cunha
President of Norte Region, Chair of the Ocean Pollution Working Group of the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission

Area programme, aims to protect biodiversity and ecosystem services in the Atlantic Area by improving capabilities to monitor, prevent and remove marine litter.
Maritime Innovation

Encouraging innovation in the Blue Economy is a key priority of the Atlantic Arc Commission. For a concrete application of its knowledge and network, the AAC participated in the application of one Horizon Europe project proposal:

- **BlueMissionAA**, under the Horizon Europe call “Atlantic and Arctic basins lighthouse coordination activities”. If successful, the project will act as the coordination hub that will support the implementation of the EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030 in the Atlantic & Arctic basins. It will focus on restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems and increased climate resilience. The project will deliver an effective governance framework and provide a wide range catalogue of supporting services, to foster an attractive innovation ecosystem in the Atlantic area for ecological restoration.

An innovative future for the Blue Economy should also consider the preparation to upskilling and reskilling of the workforce. In addition to its activities in the framework of the ORE Pact for Skills, the Atlantic Arc Commission has been working on the submission of one Erasmus+ project proposal:

- **A VET Excellence Aquaculture Project**, under the Erasmus+ call "Partnership for Excellence - Centres of Vocational Excellence ". Initiated by Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region, the Atlantic Arc Commission has been working on the full creation of a proposal for project aiming at updating an innovative sustainable curriculum for Vocational and Education Training in the Atlantic Aquaculture sector, in order for the Atlantic Area to boost the sector and remain competitive on the growing global market. The proposal should be submitted in September 2022.

“The Atlantic has great potential and resources to become an innovative pilot area to boost competences in the maritime sectors. We must encourage funding of EU projects to deploy significant actions with regional stakeholders to enhance the capacity of our sectors to attract new talents.”

**Mathieu Bergé**
Regional Councilor for Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region
ACCESSIBILITY/ATTRACTIVITY

Paving the way for an effective Blue and Green Atlantic Arc of Transport while ensuring sustainable tourism

Priorities:
- Paving the way to make the most of EU funding available for transport and tourism
- Gaining visibility at EU level on TEN-T negotiation and connecting with other GCs

General successes:
- Birth of the AspBAN project
- Participation in TEN-T Influence
- Rebuilding AAC Involvement on Sustainable Tourism

The AAC contribution to the TEN-T revision

On December 14, the European Commission presented its proposal for the revision of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) regulation, after a long preparation process in which the CPMR General Secretariat and the AAC actively participated, notably via its answer to the public consultation and production of maps to improve the network, strengthened by a political declaration adopted earlier in 2021.

The Atlantic Arc Commission has long called for the development of a true Blue and Green Atlantic Arc of Transport, enhancing the territorial accessibility of its member regions.
Nevertheless, the Atlantic Arc Commission believed further improvements were still missing of this draft proposal, which will constitute key messages to continue this work of influence on the TEN-T policy in the future.

Finally, to strengthen an Atlantic position on the TEN-T policy, the Atlantic Arc Commission also cultivated its cooperation the Atlantic Transnational Network (ATN-RTA), framed by a memorandum of understanding since 2014. On September 28, 2021, the AAC was invited to participate in the ATN-RTA orientation committee to debate on the revision of the TEN-T, organised in Extremadura, Spain.

First year of development for the AspBAN project – Flagship project of the Atlantic Strategy Pillar I

Officially kicked-off in May 2021, the AspBAN project, of which the Atlantic Arc Commission is a partner, is co-funded by the EMFF and aims at developing a dynamic acceleration platform for ports to become hubs of the Blue Economy. The first year of implementation of the project offered valuable insights to the AAC Transport Working Group to map to connect with key stakeholders, trigger discussions on a green and innovative future of EU ports, and map the current needs, expectations, and challenges to boost the development of Atlantic SMEs in ports.

The AspBAN has deployed an impressive set of actions within the first year, as illustrated by its open innovation call and acceleration services call for start-ups, which resulted in winning the Atlantic Project Awards 2021 under the category “Ports as gateways and hubs of the Blue Economy” during the Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Conference 2021.
The Atlantic Arc Commission played an active role in capitalisation activities and presented the projects during several transport related CPMR events and hub meetings. It notably organised two major workshops:

- “Perspectives on Green Ports of the Future” on October 21, 2021 at the Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Conference, together with the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO). The event gathered experts coming from the ports sector, private companies operating in ports, regional and national governments for them to present their different perspectives on Green ports of the future.

- “Shaping the best EU competitive ports in EU Islands”, on December 09, 2021, together with the CPMR Islands Commission. This joint workshop offered a rich discussion on the challenges and future opportunities of the diversification and modernisation of islands ports. This meeting was organised in the framework of the CPMR Blue Acceleration Platform set up via the AspBAN project during the AAC General Assembly 2021, facilitating exchanges on the replicability of the project in other sea-basins and encouraging an innovative and sustainable transition of ports as hubs of the Blue Economy. Upcoming joint workshops and a Blue Summit are expected to be organised by the CPMR until 2023.
Tourism: Reflecting together on a sustainable future to enhance and protect the Atlantic heritage

Towards a co-creation of the Transition Pathway for Tourism

In light of the 2021 Updated EU Industrial Strategy and in the face of the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry, the tourism ecosystem has been chosen as the first industrial ecosystem to work on a transition pathway by the European Commission. In June 2021, they opened the co-creation process with a targeted consultation, on which the CPMR contributed with a joint response voicing the regions’ challenges and needs.

In order to further disseminate its position, the CPMR co-organised with the SEArica Intergroup the seminar “Towards an EU Strategy for Sustainable Tourism” in October 2021 to pave the way forward smarter and greener in the EU coastal and insular regions. The seminar gathered key MEPs involved in discussions around the future EU Strategy on Tourism such as Tonino Picula, Josianne Cutajar, Vangelis Meimarakis, François Alfonsi, and Claudia Monteiro de Aguiar. On that occasion, Marta Barca, Director General in charge of Tourism in Cantabria Region, Chair of the AAC Tourism Working Group, was invited to present Cantabria initiatives and recalled that an EU tourism recovery agenda should plan strong support to SMEs and regional campaigns. On the Atlantic, she stressed common priorities and highlighted sustainable tourism not only as a way to preserve the environment and resources, but also to differentiate the specificities of the regions and thus diversify their offer, notably with the use of innovation.
Sowing the seeds of an Atlantic project

As a follow-up of the first technical paper delivered by the Atlantic Arc Commission’s Secretariat on a benchmark of the Atlantic regions’ sustainable tourism strategies which concluded that Atlantic many commonalities could be identified across the Atlantic regions, a second technical paper has been presented in the context of the hub meetings of November 2021. This paper aimed at providing advice on funding opportunities to boost the Atlantic regions’ cooperation on sustainable tourism and highlighting needs to engage in a joint political action to support new funding opportunities for cooperation.

This paper set a basis of discussion for future proposals for projects which may be formalized by the AAC regions and stakeholders.

“The work carried out by the Atlantic Arc Commission shows many commonalities between Atlantic regions in their ambitions towards sustainable and digital tourism. More than ever in this time of change after the COVID-19 crisis, we need to join our forces and reflect on joint actions to operate this transition together.”

Marta Barca
Director General of Tourism for Cantabria Region, Chair of the Tourism Working Group of the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission
THE AAC IMPACT

2 Political Declarations

DECLARATION ON OFFSHORE RENEWABLE ENERGIES
April 2021

ANNUAL POLITICAL DECLARATION
2021

4 on-going Maritime Projects

ASPBAN (EMFF)

CLEANATLANTIC (INTERREG ATLANTIC AREA)

SAFER (INTERREG ATLANTIC AREA)

FANBEST (INTERREG ATLANTIC AREA)

11 high-level events & meetings organised

HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE/AAC GENERAL ASSEMBLY
June 09, 2021

SAFER FINAL CONFERENCE
September 20, 2021

RIS3 WORKSHOP AT THE EUROPEAN WEEK OF THE REGIONS AND CITIES
October 12, 2021

ATLANTIC STAKEHOLDER PLATFORM CONFERENCE WORKSHOP
October 21, 2021

MEETING OF PORTUGESE REGIONS & CPMR PRESIDENCY IN LISBON
November 19, 2021

CPMR COASTAL REGIONS FORUM AT THE ONE OCEAN SUMMIT
February 11, 2022

MEETING WITH THE FRENCH SECRETARIAT FOR EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
March 15, 2022

HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON MARINE RENEWABLE ENERGIES
April 04, 2022

AAC HUBS MEETINGS
November 2021, April 2022
4 technical analyses

RIS3 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

ADVICE ON EU FUNDING ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

RETHINKING COOPERATION AFTER BREXIT: INVOLVEMENT ON NON-EU COUNTRIES IN EU PROGRAMMES

MACRO-REGION TECHNICAL NOTE

Active contribution to the wider CPMR network

SEARICA SEMINAR ON TOURISM October 1, 2021

CPMR GENERAL ASSEMBLY October 13-14, 2021

CPMR POLITICAL BUREAUS June 2021, March 2022

18 Representatives of the European Institutions met during AAC events

DG MARE

DG REGIO

DG GROW

DG ENER

DG RTD

MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK

& MORE