# Atlantic Arc Commission Activity Report 2021

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FOREWORD

In October 2020, I had the honour to be elected as President of the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission. On that occasion, the members joined their forces to set up new and ambitious objectives for a smart, sustainable, and more institutionalised cooperation framework across the Atlantic.

This new impetus for our Commission came at time of major changes for the Atlantic territories, facing the consequences of Brexit and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. In this challenging context, I am proud that our Atlantic Arc Commission has kept on voicing the concerns and demands of the Atlantic regions, and has striven to harness major opportunities for the recovery of the Atlantic.

Enhancing Atlantic Cooperation has been at the heart of our actions this year. This year marked an increasing pace of activities to foster the creation of an Atlantic Macro Region. Through the AAC, we have cooperated to make our voices heard at state level, but also complemented our actions at the EU level with the production of a political declaration which was presented in the occasion of meetings with Commissioner Ferreira and the Portuguese Presidency of the Council.

Following the announcement of Brexit, the member regions increased joint actions to frame a sustainable recovery and maintain relationships with our partners in the UK, and beyond. The AAC worked together on a position on the Brexit Adjustment Reserve which was presented and discussed with Commissioner Ferreira, and members of the European Parliament. The AAC, now advisor at the Atlantic Strategy Committee, has followed the revision of the Atlantic Action Plan 2.0 and has supported key actors to better strengthen the regional perspective.

As maritime activities are a strong component of our shared identity, the AAC multiplied the opportunities to be at the heart of key discussions and initiatives on Marine Renewable Energies, RIS3 and Blue Skills, Aquaculture and Fisheries for a more competitive, sustainable, and digital maritime sector in the Atlantic. Accessibility and Attractivity are core themes for the Atlantic, and the AAC continuous work on TEN-T led to an important representation of Atlantic countries in the response to the CPMR TEN-T consultation, which marks an essential step for the next stages of proceedings. This year also marked the rebirth of the Tourism and Culture Working group, which will be essential to identify paths for cooperation for a sustainable recovery of the sector.

The strength of the Atlantic Arc Commission relies in the scope of the actions tackled, but also in the interconnectivity between all of them, which makes us an essential network to have around the table when discussing the future of the Blue Economy and cooperation opportunities. This time of changes is offering new opportunities for the Atlantic, and the steps taken towards the priorities of this term this year have engaged a promising future to reach our objectives for 2020-2022 and beyond.

In this encouraging prospect, I am pleased to share with you the Activity Report 2020-2021 and wish you a nice reading. With Pleasure,

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

Associated partners: Atlantic Arc Cities, RTA, AC3A
ELISE WATTRELOT, NEW EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Already strong of her experience as a Policy Analyst for the Atlantic Arc Commission and the CPMR General Secretariat on maritime affairs, Elise Wattrelot was chosen to replace Katie Cavell as new Executive Secretary of the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission in September 2020. On her experience this year, she stated:

"With the Brexit agreement reached on 24 December 2020 and the outbreak of COVID19 which deeply affected the Atlantic Regions, the 2020-2021 period started under historical circumstances and mark a unique time to reshape Atlantic cooperation. In this challenging context I was thrilled and motivated to start my new position and support the Atlantic Arc Regions in breathing new life into the Atlantic cooperation. Under the impulse of our new AAC Presidency, and the great dynamism and political commitments of all the Atlantic regions, the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat has worked intensively to support member regions in developing common messages and strong political proposals on key issues for the Atlantic. We have successfully passed them to the highest representatives of the EU institutions. We notably managed successfully to strengthen our relations with key Members of the European Parliament enabling AAC messages to be included in different reports such as on the Atlantic Strategy and on the Brexit Adjustment Reserve. We have also extended our horizon with a proposal of pilot project on transatlantic cooperation. I look forward to continuing supporting the Atlantic Arc Commission member regions in their endeavours to reinforce their cooperation and voice their interest at EU level and beyond!"

She is accompanied by a team of two persons, Catherine Petiau, Policy Assistant, and Delphine Kaczorowski, Project & Policy Officer. They have been supported by two CPMR VIE contracts who were notably involved in the Atlantic projects.
ATLANTIC COOPERATION: Harnessing the opportunities to strengthen and institutionalise joint actions in the context of Brexit and the recovery

1. Atlantic Strategy

The new Atlantic Action Plan 2.0 (AAP 2.0) with the creation of four new pillars and governance system has been a core activity of the Atlantic Strategy Task Force. The group followed and continued to promote the Atlantic regions needs and ambitions throughout the preparatory phase of the Action Plan (see 2019 Declaration). Thanks to its actions, the AAC has moved from an observer status to and the status of associated partner to the Atlantic Strategic Committee (ASC). The Atlantic Regions have also now the possibility to be part of a national delegation to the ASC as well as contributing to the implementation of the four pillars of the Strategy.

In October 2020, the AAC analysed the proposal of the European Commission on the AAP 2.0 and participated in the European Maritime Days workshop on the AAP 2.0. In December 2020, the AAC met with the Irish Presidency of the Atlantic Strategy which presented its priorities for 2021. This meeting enabled the AAC to mention the aim to evolve towards a macro-region, and to engage contacts individually with the new pillar coordinators.

In collaboration with Cantabria Region, the AAC Secretariat circulated a questionnaire on the AAP 2.0 in December 2020 aiming at mapping the regions’ interests on fields of cooperation and on the governance of the revised action plan. The answers from the Atlantic member regions supported the production of Paula Fernandez’s report to the Committee of the Regions on a new approach to the Atlantic Maritime Strategy. The result was also compiled in a technical paper.

At the European Parliament level, the AAC Secretariat also collaborated with MEP Younous Omarjee and MEP Pierre Karleskind on their reports on the Atlantic Action Plan 2.0, sharing the AAC main messages.
**SEArica event on the Atlantic Strategy**

During the first semester of 2021, the AAC worked on the organisation of a **SEArica Intergroup event** “The new Atlantic Action Plan 2.0: opportunities and perspectives of cooperation in the Atlantic Area”, held on May 26 2021, in collaboration with the Irish Atlantic Strategy Presidency and MEP Manuel Pizarro. This meeting gathered key representatives of the Atlantic in order not only to tackle the current plan, but also to learn from other intergovernmental strategies and identify opportunities and challenges for a revamped and ambitious future for the Atlantic cooperation. Marian Elorza, as well as a series of local and regional stakeholders, participated in the meeting which gathered key MEPs (Manuel Pizarro, Pierre Karleskind, Claudia Monteiro de Aguiar, Caroline Roose, Grace O’Sullivan), Portuguese Minister of the Sea Ricardo Serrao Santos, the Irish Chair of the Atlantic Strategy Committee, DG MARE, to share their views on the AAP 2.0.

> “This year, the Atlantic Arc Commission has been collaborating with key EU representatives in the Commission, the European Parliament and Member States to reflect our vision for the Atlantic Action Plan 2.0. For a successful and pertinent execution of the strategy, Regions need to be considered as major stakeholders, from the decision-making to the implementation process of the Atlantic Strategy, which makes the AAC a fundamental network to interact with.”

Maria Teresa Mourão de Almeida
President of the CCDR de Lisboa e Vale de Tejo, Vice-President of the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission
INTERREG Atlantic Area programme 2021-2027

The AAC also coordinated a common response to the Interreg Atlantic Area public consultation on the future of the programme for 2021-2027, in March 2021. The results of the Interreg Atlantic Area Consultation globally reflected the AAC position, as:

- PO1 “A more competitive and smarter Europe”, PO2 “A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe” and “PO4 A more social and inclusive Europe” were also considered the most important Policy Objectives in the Consultation’s results;
- A Better connection of coastal and inland issues, notably on themes such as Agrifood, Energy, Biodiversity, Eco-innovation, Transport, Education have been mentioned in the general remarks;
- The inclusion of ISO1 to articulate with non-EU Regions and a strengthened coordination with the Atlantic Maritime Strategy have been mentioned in the governance and capitalisation section;
- Tourism, Blue Energy and Ports have been mentioned in the thematic remarks.

The full results of the consultation are available here.

2. Macro-regional Strategy

The evolution towards a macro-regional strategy for the Atlantic has been established as a key priority for this new mandate of the Atlantic Arc Commission. Over the last year, an increasing deployment of activities has been articulated within the AAC, both at the regional and EU levels.

In December 2020, the AAC adopted a political declaration on the proposal of a EU Atlantic Macro-Regional strategy, addressed to the European Council. In the context of Brexit and COVID-19, the declaration highlighted the benefits of an Atlantic Macro-Region to reinforce joint actions, and its essential role to coordinate between Member States and regions in the recovery process as well as to enable a better alignment of sources of funding.
The declaration has been sent and presented to key EU representatives, which enabled meetings with the Portuguese and Irish permanent representations and the French General Secretariat of the Sea. The Atlantic macro-region political project of the AAC has been raised on the occasion of two meetings with Commissioner Ferreira, in June 2020 and February 2021. She expressed particular interest in the topic and welcomed the occasion to follow the developments of the Atlantic Macro Regional Strategy.

The AAC regions have been essential to promote such political project to their respective national levels. Basque Country region engaged with the First Minister through a Letter from President Urkullu to Pedro Sanchez, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the Secretary of State for EU Affairs, and the French Secretariat of State for EU affairs. Lisboa e Vale do Tejo region also engaged further actions at the Portuguese national level. Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Pays de la Loire and Bretagne regions co-signed a letter addressed to Clément Beaune, French Secretary of State in charge of European Affairs.

The AAC also received the support of the CPMR President, Cees Loggen. During the Macro-Regional Week beginning of March 2021, CPMR President Cees Loggen was offered a time to open the event and to voice the benefits of Macro-Regions in the time of recovery and recalled the activities in the Atlantic area for the development of a macro-regional strategy.

"An Atlantic macro-region would be a unique opportunity for more institutionalised cooperation and genuine multilevel governance, where the Atlantic regions would be fully fledge members The Macro-Region should imply and connect connect the maritime and inland challenges, and promote the transatlantic cooperation."
3. Brexit: rethinking Atlantic cooperation

**Concretisation of the Brexit Deal**

The UK-EU agreement, reached on 24 December 2020, has crystallised the actions carried out by the Atlantic Arc Commission to raise the concerns of Atlantic regions since 2017. After the announcement of the Brexit Deal, the AAC remained active in preparing the transition period and beyond, notably with a CPMR Analysis of the Brexit Deal. Brexit represents a major milestone and triggered a broader reflection at the CPMR level with the production of an internal strategy to harness all opportunities to maintain bonds and identify paths of cooperation with UK regions, but also at the international level.

In January 2021, a CPMR communication campaign on Brexit was organised with the dissemination of video statements of political representatives, in which AAC regions participated actively.

- **Marian Elorza, Basque Country, on the Brexit Adjustment Reserve**
- **Jesús Gamallo Aller, Galicia, on the impact of Brexit on the fisheries sector**
- **Vanessa Charbonneau, Pays de la Loire, on the future of cross-border cooperation**
- **Loïg Chesnais-Girard, Brittany, on the essential role of the regions**
The Brexit Adjustment Reserve

In order to prepare the aftermath of Brexit, the AAC has particularly worked on the European Commission’s proposal for a Brexit Adjustment Reserve (BAR). In July 2020, the European Council agreed on the creation of a Brexit Adjustment Reserve “to counter the unforeseen and adverse consequences in Member States and sectors that are worst affected”, with a EUR 5 billion total allocation. In collaboration with the North Sea Commission, the AAC adopted a political declaration in December 2020, calling for:

- An important involvement of local and regional authorities in the governance and implementation of the reserve;
- A targeted and unfragmented funding considering the local specificities and sectors highly depending on their relationships with the UK;
- A quick and efficient allocation of the fund.

The declaration has been promoted to relevant EU political representatives. The work on the Brexit Adjustment Reserve eventually led to a meeting between a CPMR delegation, composed of AAC and North Sea representatives, and Commissioner Ferreira, urging for a timely, specific, and targeted Brexit Adjustment Reserve. The AAC concerns have been directly raised, with highlights on the regions’ participation in the implementation of the BAR and on the impact on different Atlantic sectors such as fisheries.

At the European Parliament level, the AAC has engaged several contacts with MEP Pascal Arimont’s team, rapporteur on Brexit Adjustment Reserve at the European Parliament in early February 2021 to promote the declaration and further discuss the BAR. Discussions were also engaged with MEP Irène Tolleret, Shadow-Rapporteur on BAR for REGI Committee, who was invited to share her view on the Brexit Adjustment Reserve and the European Parliament’s timeline and challenges during the AAC Political Steering Group in March 2021.

The AAC also met with the Portuguese Permanent Representation in February 2021 to present the AAC messages on the BAR and contributed to the debate during the CPMR Core Group on the Brexit Adjustment Reserve and the Resilient and Recovery Facility in the presence of Stefan Appel, Head of Unit, Administrative Capacity Building and European Solidarity Fund, DG REGIO.
Interview with Francesco Molica, CPMR Regional Policy Director

How did the CPMR contribute to the creation of the Brexit Adjustment Reserve?

Arguably, the CPMR was the first organisation to call for a dedicated mechanism to offset the territorial effects of Brexit as far back as 2017. In the course of the following years the organisation put massive efforts into advocating for this instrument. In March 2019 French Minister of European and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, was invited to the CPMR Political Bureau where he publicly committed to supporting the proposal. Furthermore, the Atlantic Arc Commission pleaded for the creation of a Brexit Reserve in two separate meetings with the European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reform, Elisa Ferreira, in May and June 2020. It can be fairly assumed that the CPMR contributed a great deal to building the political momentum which led Member States to agree on the establishment of the Brexit Adjustment Reserve in July 2020.

How can the EU ensure the involvement of the regions in the governance of the Brexit Adjustment Reserve?

The legislative proposal is still being negotiated by the co-legislators. The European Parliament has adopted amendments requiring a close involvement of regional authorities in the design and implementation of measures financed through the reserve. This is also the result of CPMR intense advocacy activity towards relevant MEPs, including the rapporteurs for the proposal. On the other hand, Council is less keen on the application of the partnership and multi-level principles to the reserve. Regardless of the outcome of trilogues, I believe the Commission should leverage its role in assessing the funding applications to sway Member States into embracing an inclusive governance. That would be consistent with the strong territorial nature of the reserve.

What are the next steps for the CPMR on the Brexit Adjustment Reserve?

At the moment we are closely following the legislative negotiations to ensure our demands for a place-sensitive and multi-level governance instrument are met in the final regulation. Once the reserve is adopted and up and running, we intend to monitor its implementation and make sure any concerns arising from our regions are conveyed to relevant EU decision-makers and properly addressed. Looking ahead, we will look to promote a reflection on whether the medium- and long-term effects of Brexit at territorial level need additional initiatives at EU level.
4. Transatlantic ambitions: Development of a pilot project

In the context of Brexit and the Atlantic Arc Commission’s ambitions to further expand cooperation with transatlantic countries, the AAC Secretariat conceptualised a pilot project to create a unique framework of cooperation for projects between EU Atlantic regions and non-EU regions in the Atlantic, going beyond the agreement dedicated to research (Galway and Belem Statements) and the existing Interreg programmes. The project sets a series of different actions to foster peer-learning and exchanges of best practice, capacity building, and networking activities. These actions will tackle the sustainability of marine leisure activities, climate change and coastal erosion issues, which need innovative answers and the involvement of all actors across the Atlantic.

Eleni Marianou, CPMR Secretary General proposed this initiative to MEP Younous Omarjee, who supported the project. The AAC Secretariat kept regular contacts with MEP Younous Omarjee and DG REGIO to further develop the concept of the pilot project. The AAC identified and approached key EU and non-EU actors to build the consortium and circulated a letter of expression of interest among the potential partners to enhance the application. The Atlantic Arc Commission especially reactivated contacts with Québec on that occasion. The concept was presented and validated during the Political Steering Group in March 2021, and the pilot project was submitted by MEP Younous Omarjee to the European Parliament end of March 2021. If successful, the project would last two years, with a budget of 800.00 euros.

“As the current coordinator of the CPMR Task Force on Co-operation with non-EU Regions, the Welsh Government welcomes this timely initiative. We believe it will demonstrate the strong demand for enhanced cooperation on marine and environmental issues between likeminded regions on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.”
MARITIME ACTIVITIES: Innovation and technologies for a sustainable future of the Atlantic Blue Economy

1. Marine Renewable Energies

Within the framework of the Atlantic Strategy, the Atlantic Arc Commission closely followed and participated in several meetings of the Pillar III of the AAP 2.0 “Marine Renewable Energy”. The Pillar III Work Plan, which will be followed by the AAC Working Group, has been presented during the hub meetings of November 2020. The Work Plan sets up seven main actions in order to promote carbon neutrality through marine renewable energies, and particularly mentions the role of the AAC MRE Working Group in the governance of the pillar, highlighting its responsibility to work on specific actions and to elaborate corresponding documents.

In February 2021, and as Pillar III Task Force member, the AAC Secretariat was asked to compile the regions’ aspirations and ideas of cooperation projects to develop innovative Marine Renewable Energies, combining nature conservation and/or restoration in the Atlantic area. The feedback was sent to DG MARE, which aimed at mapping project needs and ideas that could be funded under the forthcoming EMFF fund, with a potential budget of 1 million euros.

The AAC is also exploring paths to deepen collaboration with other sea basins. In February 2021, the AAC Secretariat, the CPMR Islands Commission and Pays de la Loire development agency Solutions&Co co-organised a webinar on Marine Renewable Energies and Smart Grids in EU islands. This meeting was an opportunity to share experiences on the development of MRE technologies in different geographical contexts. Participants welcomed this opportunity to exchange with other sea-basins, and the Atlantic Arc Commission and Islands Commission are discussing opportunities to further cooperate.
In addition to these activities and in line with the AAC’s All Atlantic Skills Alliance voted in 2019, the Atlantic Arc Commission joined a Pact for Skills on Offshore Renewable Energy, a large-scale partnership on Skills, among them CETMAR, WindEurope, Ocean Energy Europe and SeaEurope. The Atlantic Arc Commission is the only representative of regional authorities of this partnership, which further enhances the visibility of the AAC in the MRE sector and thus will help to connect regions with key representatives of the sector and prepare the ground to benefit from future financial and political opportunities. The Pact for Skills aims at fostering collaborations and initiatives to update and improve the skills so as to adapt to the sector needs, and thus improve the competitiveness and attractiveness of Offshore Renewable Energy jobs in the Atlantic. In May 2021, this framework enabled the AAC to participate as an observer in a roundtable in the presence of Commissioners Virginijus Sinkevičius, Thierry Breton and Nicolas Schmit to tackle the challenges of upskilling and reskilling of the workforce, to identify the support needed for skill developments, and discuss the commitment of the participants to the Pact for Skills.

“"The Atlantic Ocean offers major natural assets to develop Marine Renewable Energies. By ensuring the coordination of the Pillar III “Marine Renewable Energies” of the Atlantic Strategy and collaborating with each other and as well as with other territories, we have the potential to become a leading region in that respect and to play a major role in the success of the EU clean energy objectives.”

Olatz Ajuria
Project Manager, EVE - Basque Energy Agency and Coordinator of the Pillar III of the Atlantic Strategy
2. Smart specialisations, Innovation, Aquaculture & Fisheries

Exploring Atlantic cooperation on Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3)

For the term 2020-2022, an analysis of Smart Specialisation in the in the Atlantic Area has been identified as an essential aspect of the Atlantic Arc Commission actions. This last year, the AAC mapped opportunities for cooperation on RIS3 in a technical analysis and connect with relevant actors to inform the AAC regions on examples of RIS3 cooperation in other geographical areas and on future EU financial opportunities to develop such cooperation in the future.

In coordination with Lisbon the Basque Country regions, the AAC Secretariat contributed to a successful application for a workshop at the European Week of the Regions and Cities 2021.

The workshop is entitled “Blue Economy and RIS3, fostering Innovation in the Atlantic Area”, and will gather AAC speakers to discuss on the identification of Smart Specialisation cooperation opportunities in the Blue Growth area with the outlook into the Atlantic Action Plan 2.0. The workshop will encourage to share knowledge to cluster together and scale-up innovative products and services in the field of action of the Atlantic Strategy.

In February 2021, the AAC also met with Smart Specialisation EU experts from the Joint Research Centre and DG MARE to understand the upcoming EU agenda and ambitions on Blue RIS3 and to express the interests of the AAC regions. Participants agreed on the importance of more cooperation with regions in the implementation of RIS3, especially in Blue Economy.

During April 2021 Hub meetings, DG REGIO presented the functioning of the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3 tool), and shared advice on the implementation and use of the funding to AAC regions. The AAC looked at the Baltic experience in RIS3, especially in the context of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), a macro-regional strategy with an important focus on Smart Specialisation and Innovation.
Blue Skills and Aquaculture: project in the making

Aquaculture has become one of the fastest growing food production sectors worldwide, with an increasing demand and consumption, which makes traditional Atlantic aquaculture a major asset in that respect. However, needs for the inclusion of technologies have been raised in order to remain competitive and sustainable, which de facto requires up-skilling and re-skilling of the workforce. Aquaculture jobs also faces a lack of interest with the youth, which will need further communication and adaptation to boost its attractiveness.

In coordination with the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region, the AAC Secretariat conceptualised a project aiming at adapting the training skills in the aquaculture sector in the Atlantic, in order to match the needs and resources of the regions thanks to innovation and to better attract new workers. The AAC identified partners in Spain, Portugal, France, and Ireland. The project targets the Erasmus+ VET Excellence call, which deadline is set on September 7, 2021.

Work on Fisheries

The AAC has regularly worked in the framework of the CPMR Fisheries Working group, which is coordinated by Pays de Loire. High level meetings were organised with Charlina Vitcheva, Director-General, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), the German Permanent Representation and key MEPs such as Pierre Karleskind to prepare the EMFAF negotiations and the preparation of the CFP review. A number of CPMR messages were included in the final EMFAF regulation, thanks to the mobilisation of Atlantic regions, e.g the removal of obligation to use financial instrument for certain operations, the reduction of ineligible measures and a greater recognition of the role of regions when developing the operational programmes.
ATTRACTION AND ACCESSIBILITY: continuity of the AAC work on Atlantic connectivity, rebirth of the Tourism Working Group

1. Transport

Transport Policy is an essential work at the CPMR as well as at the Atlantic Arc Commission. This last year, the AAC especially worked on the Trans-European Network of Transport (TEN-T) regulation. It contributed to the CPMR response to the European Commission’s consultation to revise the TEN-T Guidelines and agreed on a specific Political Declaration which was forwarded to key representatives of the European Parliament and the European Commission to voice the Atlantic needs. In its contribution, the AAC promoted a strengthened Atlantic dimension in the global TEN-T policy and defended the development of a strong Blue and Green Atlantic Transport Arc, exemplified with maps to detail specific regional an inter-regional connectivity demands. The European Commission’s adoption is expected for second quarter 2021.

The AAC also re-engaged contacts with the RTA-ATN, the network of economic and social committees of the Atlantic, both linked by a memorandum of understanding since 2016 in order to nurture the work of the network on TEN-T.

“Sustainable transports and connectivity are essential to the majority of socio-economic activities in the Atlantic. Our common response to the TEN-T consultation was a major step to achieve a real Blue and Green Atlantic Arc of Transport at the European level which will improve our connection within our regions, between each other, but also with the world.”

Loly de Juan
Director of Transport Infrastructure, Basque Country

Proposals for amendments to the maps of the TEN-T: Atlantic Arc Commission
Interview with Lucas Bosser, CPMR Transport Director

What have been the main activities and achievements of the CPMR over the last year?

Our main focus over the last year has been the Revision Process of the Guidelines for the Trans European Network for Transport. Our efforts consisted in contributing to the roadmap for the Public Consultation in December 2020 and then to the Public Consultation itself in May 2021. We, also, dedicated some efforts to influencing (successfully) MEP Gens Gieseke’s INI report on TEN-T.

From a less EU legislation perspective, we initiated a study on territorial accessibility with our colleague Guillaume Moreno. He presented the first version of this work in March. We will pursue our efforts in this direction as we aim at establishing a criteria for CEF 2.0 projects to take benefit from our efforts to include territorial accessibility in the list of award criteria for the 2021-2027 Programming Period.

How can the EU support a transition towards climate and sustainable transports while avoiding a deepening of regional disparities between more and less advanced regions on green transports?

This is indeed a major challenge of the Green Deal. Not so long time ago, as I was addressing a panel underlining that the conciliation of climate neutral transport and territorial accessibility was key, a panellist from DG MOVE underlined that it was indeed a major headache. Actually, I don’t think that there is any magical solution. However, there are several principles that would facilitate a smooth transition. For instance, the Legislator should avoid a one-solution-fits-all approach or creating to many new standards while empowering local actors to allow each Region developing the most suitable technological solution. In that respect, although the full electrification of the EU rail network seems like a good plan, for some railways that face singular challenges (in mountainous areas, isolated network for instance) other technologies, such as hydrogen, would be more efficient.

What are the upcoming activities planned for the CPMR Transport Working Group and how the AAC can contribute?

The AAC is always a key contributor to the work of the CPMR Intercommissions Working Group. I know that the AAC’s member Regions will continue their great work to nourish our Group. Actually, we will need this support as the EC will publish shortly (in October it seems) its proposal for the revised TEN-T Guidelines. Starting from there, we will pursue our lobbying efforts to work with the European Parliament and the Council. The support of the AAC will be key to maximise our impact on both institutions. In that respect, the workshop organised in September 2019 by the AAC and the Basque Country was a very impactful initiative that could be replicated. Hopefully, this fall, we will be able to travel along the beautiful Atlantic coast and organise an old fashion seminar!

In parallel, we will follow closely the first CEF 2.0 calls and continue our work on territorial accessibility. There is no doubt that the AAC will contribute to these initiatives as well.
2. Tourism

During the General Assembly in June 2020, the Atlantic Arc Commission agreed on the revival of the Working Group on Tourism and Culture, led by Cantabria region. In March 2021, the AAC Secretariat welcomed and met Marta Barca, new Director General in charge of Tourism of the government of Cantabria in order to discuss her ambitions for the group.

Tourism, and especially the recovery of the sector of the context of the pandemic, has been of growing interest at the CPMR, which eventually led to the co-organisation of an event with the SEArica Intergroup in 2020, “Towards Sustainable Tourism in the Maritime and Coastal Regions of Europe - Perspectives on the recovery from the Covid-19 crisis and beyond” in July 2020, in which the Atlantic Arc Commission was represented.

The AAC actively contributed to Paula Fernández Viaña’s report for the Committee of the Regions on the Atlantic Action Plan 2.0, adopted in plenary on 19 March 2021, in which she asks for a dedicated pillar on tourism in the AAP 2.0.

The hub meetings of November 2020 and April 2021 were the occasion to set initial discussions on the recovery of the Tourism sector with AAC member regions and key decision-makers. In April 2021, the AAC Secretariat presented its benchmark of the regional strategies and initiatives on sustainable tourism in the Atlantic regions, which enabled to identify synergies in the priorities and features of the AAC regions and paved the way for potential cooperation on projects.

The AAC has also been in close contact with the CAPITEN project, on innovation in the nautical tourism value chain to foster more sustainability in marine leisure, which was presented on the occasion of the hub meetings in November 2020. The AAC will continue to work on Sustainable tourism and will identify complementary sources of funding to foster the green recovery of the sector, in all its components, including nautical tourism. The CPMR Tourism Workshop EMD 2021 will also be a landmark for identifying avenues of cooperation with other Geographical Commissions.
MARITIME PROJECTS

1. Clean Atlantic

The CleanAtlantic project, co-funded by the Interreg Atlantic Area programme, aims at protecting biodiversity and ecosystem services in the Atlantic Area by improving capabilities to monitor, prevent and remove marine litter. Initially ending in August 2020, the project has been extended until June 2021 in the context of the pandemic. The Atlantic Arc Commission is in charge of capitalisation and communication.

What’s in it for AAC members?

The AAC members have been able to follow the results of the project which mapped the hotspots of marine litter on the Atlantic seaboard, to better remove them. The AAC regions will be able to use the CleanAtlantic Knowledge Tool to learn more about EU and national projects developed against marine litter, and apply methods and initiatives in their own territories.

AAC key political actions on Marine Litter

In October 2020, the Atlantic Arc Commission organised a joint event between the project and the SEArica Intergroup of the European Parliament on “Marine Litter: EU actions for the future of our Oceans”, with the support of MEP Tonino Picula, Chair of the SEArica Intergroup, MEP Pierre Karleskind, Vice-Chair of the Intergroup responsible for Marine and Maritime Research, MEP Catherine Chabaud, Vice-Chair of the Intergroup for Climate and Governance, and MEP Manuel Pizarro, Vice-Chair of the Intergroup for the Atlantic. This event was the opportunity to gather decision-makers, regional authorities, researchers to present the project and discuss marine litter in a systemic approach. This meeting eventually led to the inclusion of mentions of the CleanAtlantic project in MEP Catherine Chabaud’s report “Impact on fisheries of marine litter” adopted by a large majority at the European Parliament in March 2021. On the demand of MEP Francisco José Millán Mon, MEP Catherine Chabaud especially urged the project to continue their work and publish its results.

The Atlantic Arc Commission has kept on nurturing tight links between the project and the Atlantic Strategy, especially with Pillar IV coordinator, through several bilateral meetings and a representation during the Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Conference in November 2020. The CleanAtlantic project outcome will be used for the implementation of Pillar IV.

At the CPMR level, the AAC collaborated with the North Sea Commission on the Waste Free Rivers webinar to be organised on June 24, 2021. The CleanAtlantic work related on rivers modelling will be presented.

At the international level, the AAC facilitated bilateral meetings between the project partners and the United National Environment Programme on Marine Litter to explore potential paths for collaboration on their respective databases of best practice.

The CleanAtlantic final conference will be organised on June 15, 2021.
2. SAFER

The SAFER project, co-funded by the Interreg Atlantic Area programme, aims to improve the innovation performance of the seafood sector by increasing technology adoption and transnational cooperation, for a smart growth of the sector in the Atlantic. Initially ending in April 2020, the project was extended until September 2021, in the context of the pandemic. The Atlantic Arc Commission is responsible for capitalisation activities.

What’s in it for AAC members?

The AAC members have been able to follow the results of the project which developed pilot actions to foster innovation transfer in seafood companies throughout the Atlantic. The AAC regions will also be able to use the SAFER Catalogue of Services to learn more about EU and national projects developed to foster innovation in the seafood value-chain and apply methods and initiatives in their own territories, notably when it comes to including seafood innovation in Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies.

AAC key political actions on Seafood

During the AAC General Assembly in June 2020, the Atlantic Arc Commission adopted the SAFER political recommendations to the European institutions, for a SAFER and Greener recovery of the seafood sector.

The AAC successfully led the application of the SAFER project to the Atlantic Project Awards, as the SAFER project won in the category “Atlantic Ports and Blue Economy”, awarded during the Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Conference 2020. During this same event, the AAC co-organised a workshop on “A SAFER approach to innovation in aquaculture: How cooperation can support ports to become hubs of the blue economy”.

This last year, the AAC especially worked on the production of a the SAFER catalogue of services. The document presents the results of the pilots’ implementation and a mapping of more than eighty best practices of innovation in the seafood sector in the Atlantic area, gathering key knowledge on available innovative services. The SAFER final conference will be organised by the Atlantic Arc Commission in September 2021.
3. ASPBAN

The Atlantic Smart Ports Blue Acceleration Network (AspBAN) project successfully answered to the DG Mare-EASME «Cross-sectoral development of innovative port clusters in the Atlantic: Developing a blue accelerator scheme for Atlantic ports». The project will be key in the implementation of the new Atlantic Action Plan 2.0 (Pillar I).

The project is led by Beta-I, a Portuguese global collaborative innovation consultancy, and involves a consortium of 13 partners from Portugal, Spain, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and the US. In addition to the partners, a network of more than 123 strategic partners will support the implementation, the dissemination and sustainability of the project. It officially kicked off in May 2021. The project will last two years, with a total budget of 1097823.43 EUR.

What’s in it for AAC members?
The project aims at launching the building blocks that will foster a dynamic acceleration services platform for EU Atlantic ports to function as an open innovation networked ecosystem of blue economy hubs, based on smart and green infrastructures, in deep connection with the EEA, transatlantic and other relevant EU and non-EU maritime basins. It will leverage the existing ecosystem elements (ports, blue accelerators & clusters, corporate & industry, finance & private funds, and policy entities), structuring and connecting them, and bringing in private investors. For the EU Atlantic Ports, the project represents an opportunity to go beyond their current services by working as blue economy hubs and being the main ecosystem for the development of new blue businesses and of a sustainable ocean economy, diversifying their activities.

Future AAC actions
The Atlantic Arc Commission will be in charge of capitalisation and communication activities, making the links with decision makers across the various levels, ensuring the visibility of the project to the relevant blue economy stakeholders and the potential transferability of the project to other sea basins, especially in the context of collaborations with the other geographical commissions of the CPMR. The AAC produced the capitalisation and dissemination plan of the project.

AspBAN was presented to the CPMR Transport Working Group in March 2021, the AAC Hub Meetings in April 2021 as well as to the SEArica Intergroup meeting dedicated to the Atlantic Strategy in May 2021, co-organised by the AAC. A first workshop will be organised by the AAC around October 2021.
MEETINGS 2020-2021

Despite the COVID-19 context which did not enable the Atlantic Arc Commission to meet in person, the AAC remained active and participate in various meetings, ensuring a good coordination with the different CPMR meetings.

- 1 General Assembly
  JUNE 2020

- 1 Plenary Meeting
  OCTOBER 2020

- 1 Political Steering Group Meeting
  MARCH 2021

- 13 CPMR Meetings
  - TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP IN SEPTEMBER 2020, DECEMBER 2020, MARCH 2021
  - AQUACULTURE & FISHERIES WORKING GROUP IN SEPTEMBER 2020, JANUARY 2021
  - CLIMATE TASK FORCE IN OCTOBER 2020, JANUARY 2021, APRIL 2021
  - COHESION CORE GROUP IN NOVEMBER 2020, FEBRUARY 2021
  - MACRO-REGIONS TASK FORCE IN SEPTEMBER 2020
  - CPMR POLITICAL BUREAU IN MARCH 2021
  - CPMR GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN OCTOBER 2020

- 3 Searica Events
  - TOURISM RECOVERY IN JULY 2020
  - CLEANATLANTIC IN OCTOBER 2020
  - ATLANTIC STRATEGY IN MAY 2021

- 2 Hub Meetings Sessions
  - NOVEMBER 2020
  - APRIL 2021
INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS

First Political Steering Group Meeting on March 23, 2021

On March 23, 2021, the Atlantic Arc Commission met on the occasion of its first political steering group meeting to tackle the AAC orientations and current priorities. The meeting enabled a discussion on the Brexit Adjustment Reserve progress with the participation of Francesco Molica, CPMR Director in charge of cohesion policy, and MEP Irène Tolleret, Shadow-Rapporteur on the Brexit Adjustment Reserve for REGI Committee. The CPMR Strategy towards UK and non-EU regions and the AAC perspectives were also discussed, as well as updates on the key AAC activities such as the Macro-Regional Strategy development. The Political Steering Group will punctually reunite whenever a need to gather and discuss the political orientations is raised.

Internal communication

This last year, the AAC Secretariat set up a Flash Info to inform the AAC members about the advancements regularly. Two Flash Info were sent in December 2020, February 2021 and another is under preparation for June 2021. The Flash Info will keep on being sent to the AAC members by email on a regular basis and made public on the AAC website.

In addition, the AAC Secretariat kept regular contact on the development of activities, with an average of 7 emails per month. The website is regularly updated, and key events are added to the calendar.

External communication

Twitter remained the main social media channel to promote the AAC activities and live-tweet events. Currently, the @Atlantic_Arc Twitter account has 1989 followers, with an increase of 114 followers since June 2020.

In the last year, the AAC coordinated several communication actions and coordinated the creation of attractive visuals to promote the macro-region, as well as a dedicated campaign on the impact of Brexit with videos of AAC representatives. The AAC also participated in the CPMR Newsletters.
Atlantic regions, together for a cohesive Atlantic Area

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