Open Letter
April 2019

5 reasons to preserve the INTERREG Atlantic Area Programme

Open Letter from the CPMR’s Atlantic Arc Commission to the Atlantic Member States, the European Parliament, and the European Commission

The CPMR’s Atlantic Arc Commission (AAC) is following very closely the current debate on the Multi-annual Financial Framework, the future of Cohesion Policy, and Brexit negotiations. In its previous Declarations, the Atlantic Arc Commission has defended the maintenance of both maritime and territorial programmes with an impact on the Atlantic Arc Commission Regions. It has been particularly attentive to the need to maintain the Atlantic Area INTERREG programme in a post Brexit context.

This programme has proved to be vital for Atlantic regions for several reasons:

- It will be essential to maintain current levels of cooperation with the UK and Ireland after Brexit;
- It is the principle programme for implementation of the Atlantic Strategy;
- It fosters exchanges, which help to increase the competitiveness of the Atlantic maritime economy;
- It enables regions to jointly tackle challenges within the Atlantic Sea Basin.

The current negotiation of the INTERREG legislative proposal for the 2021-2027 period, discussions on the geography of the future programmes, as well as Brexit negotiations, are causing considerably uncertainty for Atlantic regions and the dedicated programme for the Atlantic Area.

Through this letter, the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission is calling on the Atlantic Member States, the European Parliament, and the European Commission to maintain a cohesive Atlantic Area when shaping the future European programmes, and to ensure an appropriate level of financing.

1. In the context of Brexit, the Atlantic Area Programme is essential to keep a cohesive Atlantic Area

Thanks to successive European programmes including Atlantis, INTERREG II C, INTERREG IIIB, INTERREG IVB, and INTERREG VB, networks of Atlantic stakeholders have been progressively developed. The INTERREG Atlantic Area Programme has built trust among regional stakeholders, which is reflected in the numbers of applications. The first call for the 2014-2020 programming period received 425 applications. Today, this long-standing cooperation is being threatened by Brexit. The UK government has not yet decided on its future participation in the INTERREG programme, despite the 192 UK partners involved under the current programming period (20% of the ERDF of the programme). Furthermore, Brexit will isolate Ireland from the Atlantic community. Thus, it is of utmost importance that this tool, which benefited from such strong regional ownership, is maintained.
2. In the case of a Brexit ‘no-deal’, Atlantic stakeholders should get support for 2014-2020 programming period

In the case of ‘no-deal’, stakeholders involved in Atlantic Area INTERREG projects, as well as UK partners could be faced with unfulfilled financial commitments from the UK. On 30 January 2019, contingency measures were proposed by the European Commission in the event of a ‘no-deal’ scenario. These measures would provide assurances for 2019 payments to UK beneficiaries for a contract signed before 30 March 2019. This would imply that the UK would not be obliged to honour its financial commitments for 2020. Atlantic stakeholders need guarantees they can continue to develop their projects until 2020.

3. The Atlantic Area Programme is central to the implementation of the Atlantic Strategy

90 % of the Atlantic Area Programme funding was used to finance projects that reflected the priorities of the Atlantic Strategy during the 2014-2020 programming period. Revision of the Atlantic Strategy provides a momentum from which the Atlantic Area Programme can benefit. The Atlantic Area Programme should remain a key implementation tool of the Atlantic Action Plan.

4. The Atlantic Area Programme enables regions to jointly tackle challenges within the Atlantic Sea Basin

The Atlantic Area Programme has been vital for tackling transnational challenges faced by the Atlantic. The Atlantic Area Operational Programme is based around four priorities of key importance to all Atlantic stakeholders. Namely, innovation and competitiveness, resource efficiency, territorial risks, biodiversity, natural and cultural assets.

Significant projects have been approved within these four priority areas, which have led to the development of interesting new approaches to tackling common challenges, to developing preparedness measures, and to adopting joint actions that have improved policy-making, in particular in the maritime field. Without this framework, tackling common challenges would much more difficult.

5. The Atlantic Area Programme has been instrumental in unlocking the competitiveness of the Atlantic maritime economy

The Atlantic Area Programme has demonstrated its added value in sharing best practice among regional stakeholders, which has enabled the Atlantic maritime economy to unlock its full potential. In addition to making better use of limited resources, the Atlantic Area Programme has enabled clusters to pool resources and attract developers. Crucially, the Atlantic Area Programme has also been more flexible than other EU programmes, particularly as regards requirements and calendar. This is of great value when implementing a high-risk project, such as the deployment of marine renewable technologies in the water.

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1 For example, the project ARCOPOL PLATFORM run from January 2014 to June 2015, aimed to further improve maritime safety in the Atlantic area and reinforce the protection of coastal regions from maritime pollution through the capitalisation of best practices. With a total budget of 1.584.989,39 €, it enabled local authorities to develop contingency plans, reinforce their preparedness when responding to Hazardous and Noxious Substances, get guidelines for post-spill monitoring in the Atlantic, and receive advice for environmental cost calculation. The results have been capitalised on other sea basins, for example during the pollution accident of the Agia Zoni II in the Mediterranean Sea in September 2017.

2 The INTERREG Atlantic Area programme was awarded the BLUE GIFT Project with EU financing (£2.5 million euros from 2017 to 2020). This project is emblematic of the Atlantic maritime economy as it involves five Atlantic test sites for Marine Renewable Energy Technologies to perform tests in the water for floating wind, wave and tidal technologies.