D8.6 Policy Recommendations

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Abstract: To capitalise on the experience of AspBAN, the CPMR leads the development of policy recommendations to the European Institutions and national governments. These recommendations are based on the experience of partners in the project and aimed at supporting policy makers at EU and National level to develop the new generation of blue policies and instruments, in particular as related to the blue ecosystem potential of ports as blue economy hubs. The policy recommendations take into account synergies with regional Operational Programmes and the links with Pillar 1 of the Atlantic Action Plan 2.0 on “Ports as Gateways and Hubs of the Blue Economy”.

Version History

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Executive Summary

Considering the important role of ports for the socio-economic development of coastal areas and the need to recover from COVID in Europe while ensuring greater energy autonomy for our countries and achieving climate neutrality by 2050, the “Atlantic Smart Ports, Blue Acceleration Network” (AspBAN) project has demonstrated it is rich of a great experience when it comes to boosting the role of ports as hubs of the Blue Economy.

The following political recommendations, co-created between the AspBAN partner and the Atlantic Arc Commission regions of the Conference of Peripheral Regions (CPMR), addresses to the EU institutions, National Governments of the Atlantic area, ports, Start-ups and SMEs as well as investors, to share the results of AspBAN and draw lessons on the future policy and programme development at EU and National levels. Among the main messages, the AspBAN partners and the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission Regions, recommend:

- the European Commission to assess the possibility to create an “EU Flagship Programme for Blue Acceleration in Ports” to act as an incubator and capacity building instrument to support ports and blue enterprises of different sizes, specialisations and geographies, in their endeavour to become hubs of the sustainable blue economy;

- the European Parliament to develop an own-initiative report on ports as hubs of the sustainable blue economy, which could support the European Commission’s reflection around the creation of a flagship programme and should serve as a platform at engaging with a large community of stakeholders;

- the national governments of EU maritime countries to develop Council conclusions that would allow the European Commission to reflect on the idea of an “EU Flagship Programme for Blue Acceleration in Ports”. In particular, Atlantic Member States could seize the momentum of the Trio Council Presidency (Czech, Swedish and Spanish) in 2022-2023.

- Start-ups, SMEs evolving in the field of sustainable blue economy, ports and investors to join the AspBAN community to benefit from a wide range of contacts to support their ambitions to implement a green and digital transitions in ports.
Policy Recommendations: Boosting Ports as Hubs of the Blue Economy

Considering the important role of ports for territorial cohesion of coastal areas and the need to recover from COVID in Europe while ensuring greater energy autonomy for our countries and achieving climate neutrality by 2050; following also the first year of implementation of the project “Atlantic Smart Ports, Blue Acceleration Network” (AspBAN), the partners of the project as well as the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission regions (AAC) call on EU institutions and National Governments of the Atlantic coast to improve joint working to boost the role of ports as hubs of the blue economy in the Atlantic area and beyond.

1. Recognizing the importance of ports in the regional, national and European economies, as creator of jobs, growth and territorial cohesion;

2. Recalling that, in a globalised context, ports act as head of the export of manufactured goods and their positioning and outreach to a large pool of suppliers and customers changed them into strategic assets for there-industrialisation of our economies;

3. Highlighting that with the current acceleration of greening the economy, ports and maritime transport are experiencing huge adaptations in terms of infrastructures, technologies, planning, that require a business model that goes beyond the classic core areas of cargo and passenger handling;

4. Welcoming that the European Commission Communication on Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy positively recognise the role of ports as energy hubs, for circular economy (disposing of waste from ships), for communication (submarine cable) and for industry, beyond transhipment and logistics; and Aligning with RePower EU Action Plan underlining the significant role of ports in energy supply for the EU;

5. Taking also into account the opportunity that ports have to get closer to innovative businesses to facilitate their climate neutrality transition, their adaptation to climate change and coastline resilience, their objectives to reach zero pollution, or act in favour of the maintain of biodiversity in ports area;

6. Highlighting that these trends have been recognized and also supported at local and regional levels, as notably proved by the Research and Innovation policies of Atlantic Regions in which Smart Port, Clean Maritime Transport, Sustainable Shipbuilding, Marine Renewable Energy are frequent common priorities chosen;

7. Supporting in this sense that the Atlantic Strategy positively recognise the role of ports as hubs of the blue economy by considering this as a Pillar I of its Action Plan and delivering to the “Atlantic Smart Ports – Blue Accelerator Network” (AspBAN) project the Atlantic Award in 2021;
8. Referring to Commissioner Ferreira who considered in a speech in September 2021 to the European Parliament AspBAN as a Flagship Project of the Atlantic Strategy as well as to the Atlantic Award received by AspBAN from the Atlantic Strategy in October 2021;

9. Acknowledging from the AspBAN survey that ports expressed a need and an opportunity to diversify their business model, by acting as a platform for the development of new value chains in the field of sustainable blue economy, acting beyond their core areas such as cargo and passenger handling;

10. Acknowledging the variety of ports models in the EU and underlining the fact that mostly big ports have already initiated the “era” of ports as hubs of the sustainable blue economy, while small and medium size ports, which represent an important role in the regional development, have expressed their ambition and challenge to unlock innovation capacity, but need support in this endeavour;

11. Adding that for small and medium size-ports that lack TEN-T Core or comprehensive Port designation, support schemes to become hubs of the blue economy are quite limited. Current EU funding schemes in particular are adapted to bigger ports and mostly focus on infrastructure needs;

12. Showcasing at the same time the multiplication of funding schemes supporting the blue SMEs and Start-ups, at EU levels (EMFAF, COSME, CEF, BlueInvest) but also at national, regional levels and even at individual projects level which more and more have been offering acceleration services (INTERREG projects for example) that overall resulted in fragmenting/complexifying SMEs’ access to financing, revealing the need for a centralisation of offers.

13. Highlighting that AspBAN is also strong of a very diverse ports community, with which it has developed trust and work stream to understand strategic priorities and challenges. AspBAN has attracted in its Strategic Partners network more than 137 Strategic partners with a universe of 391 ports;

14. Underlining that AspBAN has been rich in lessons on the common needs of the Sustainable Blue Economy sector and Ports to get closer. In particular, it has revealed that matching ports’ challenges with innovative solutions proposed by start-ups requires a high investment cost that ports do not want to commit alone;

15. Reminding that AspBAN has developed an important community of SMEs developing solutions to ports. In total, 80 SMEs are engaged in the AspBAN Acceleration service programme and provide solutions in the fields of Green/Smart Ports, Aquaculture, Marine Transport, Marine Construction and Infrastructures, Marine Renewable Energy, Aquaculture, Safety and Surveillance;

16. Showcasing that AspBAN is not only relevant to the Atlantic area but also other sea-basin, as exemplified by the MedBAN project in the Mediterranean area, or recent collaborations led by AspBAN with the CPMR Islands Commission, the Balkan & Black Sea, as well as with the North Sea Commissions.
The AspBAN partners and Atlantic Arc Commission Regions express to the EU institutions, national governments, investors, blue economy sectors and ports the following recommendations:

I – Specific messages to the European Commission

The AspBAN partners and Atlantic Arc Commission Regions recommend the European Commission to assess the possibility to create an “pan-EU Flagship Programme for Blue Acceleration in Ports” to act as an incubator and capacity building instrument to support both ports and blue enterprises at the stages of establishment, in the early stages, or on expansion in their endeavour to become hubs of the sustainable blue economy.

a. Given that AspBAN has enlarged and deepened the community of stakeholders acting to develop ports as open innovation ecosystem for maritime sectors, a reflection should be launched at European Commission level on the creation of an “EU Flagship Programme for Blue Acceleration in Ports” to boost ports as hubs of the Sustainable Blue Economy. This initiative would comply with and also complement the EC Communication of Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy set of tools proposed to strengthen the European ports community (Blue forum for users of the sea and the European ports forum);

b. This “EU Flagship Programme” should perform its services according to different indicators or realities such as the size of the port, its location, its sectoral specialization, the port-to-city development plans and the regional development strategies that contribute to drive the port development in order to ensure that the programme matches the needs and dynamics of ports throughout the whole EU;

c. Such programme could act not only as a capacity building instrument for ports and SMEs but also a twinning programme to deliver solutions in ports provided by SMEs. In that way, it could also support Regions’ Smart Specialisation Strategies aiming to internationalise regional savoir-faire and technologies when it comes to Smart and Green Ports;

d. Such programme should make sure to respect the subsidiarity principle so that it fits with the local and regional constraints and opportunities. An assessment of a deployment with a decentralised management mode could be done to adapt to every Member State’s institutional context and regions capacity to deploy such programme;

e. This programme should also make sure that beneficiaries can easily use the funding opportunities in particular SMEs which has difficulties to bear the administrative cost that EU projects usually require;

f. It could be embedded in the Blue Invest Platform which offers similar support to SMEs although not performing (yet) the matchmaking with ports challenges, providing that Blue Invest is adapted to the specific needs mentioned above;

g. It would also act complementarily to existing programmes and funding schemes supporting Blue SMEs, in particular those managed directly by the European Commission (EMFAF, COSME, CEF, InvestEU). It could act as a preparatory phase for applying to more competitive sources of EU fundings. In that way, SMEs and ports would more easily navigate in the diverse panorama of support offered and rationalize the opportunities.
II – Specific messages to the European Parliament

The AspBAN partners and Atlantic Arc Commission Regions recommend the European Parliament to develop an own-initiative report on the perspective for ports to become hub of the sustainable blue economy, which could support the European Commission’s reflection around the creation of an “EU Flagship Programme for Blue Acceleration in Ports” and should serve at engaging with a large community of stakeholders.

a. It is proposed to the European Parliament to develop an own-initiative report on the state of ports as hubs of the blue economy and rely on the results of AspBAN, in particular the following papers “Concept of Acceleration Services”, “Competence needs in the industry”, “Guidelines with practical inputs to enhance the innovation readiness of Atlantic Ports and improve their innovation ecosystem efficiency” or “Demand and Market Segmentation for Blue Accelerators in the Atlantic Area”;

b. It should complement and investigate deeper on the existing reports of the European Parliament\(^1\) led by different Committees which stress that ports are not only a component of maritime transport but are increasingly clusters of all modes of transport, as well as being part of the energy, industrial and blue value chains;

c. We invite the SEArica integroup to launch an official debate on this topic in March 2023 on the occasion of a seminar co-organised with AspBAN project on Ports as hubs of the Blue Economy and suggest that next Board of SEArica discuss this proposal;

d. This event will enable to share the state of knowledge on ports as hubs of the blue economy and it should be part of a process where European Parliament members could also take advantage of the Final Conference of AspBAN to consult a wider range of stakeholders and take part in an on-field visit.

III – Specific messages to the national governments

The AspBAN partners and Atlantic Arc Commission Regions recommend the national governments develop Council conclusions that would allow the European Commission to reflect on the idea of an “EU Flagship Programme for Blue Acceleration in Ports”. In particular, Atlantic Member States could take advantage of the Trio Council Presidency (Czech, Swedish and Spanish) in 2022-2023, climaxing with the Spanish Presidency in July 2023.

a. We recommend the Council of the EU to draft Council conclusions, that could be initiated by Atlantic Member States and would steer the Commission to develop the above mentioned “flagship programme”;

b. The Council conclusions could aim for an agreement during the current Presidency trio, climaxing with the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in July 2023;

c. These conclusions should not only offer the possibility for the European Commission to initiate

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\(^1\) the European Parliament resolution of 20 January 2021 on the revision of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) guidelines (2019/2192(INI)), the European Parliament resolution of 3 May 2022 toward a sustainable blue economy in the EU: the role of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors (2021/2188(INI)) or the European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2021 on a new approach to the Atlantic maritime strategy (2020/2276(INI)) to name a few.
the “EU Flagship Programme for Blue Acceleration in Ports” but should also be the occasion for Member States to assess the level of investments for a sustainable blue economy included in the national resilience and recovery plans. Indeed, as shown in CPMR Analysis of National Recovery and Resilience Plans of June 2021, maritime policy and blue economy are essential for coastal areas recovery, yet there is a general the lack of a maritime approach in the plans, except for some exceptions such as Portugal, Spain, Greece, Cyprus and Denmark;

d. The Council Conclusions should acknowledge the role of the Atlantic Strategy in the emergence of the AspBAN project and reflect on how this example could be extended to Sea-basin strategies or macro-regional strategies with a maritime dimension, undergoing review processes;

e. The Council Conclusions could also include a monitoring in Member States on associated reforms needed to facilitate the support to ports in strengthening their role as platform for the blue economy. Special attention could be given to procedure of granting public support for disruptive technologies or permitting procedures for Offshore Renewable energy, grids connection, and maritime spatial planning licensing procedures, as identified in the European Commission Communication “An EU Strategy to harness the potential of offshore renewable energy for a climate neutral future”, the REPowerEU Plan and the deriving Commission Recommendations on speeding up permit-granting procedures for renewable energy projects;

f. To the Atlantic States involved in the Atlantic Strategy, the AspBAN partners and AAC regions recommend to make sure that AspBAN results continue to feed into the Pillar I of the Atlantic Strategy. In particular, it is recommended that the new Pillar coordinator and Atlantic Strategy Committee reflect on ways to sustain and further nourish the work initiative by AspBAN;

g. In particular, it asks the Atlantic Strategy Committee and the Assistance Mechanism to reflect with AspBAN partners on ways to nourish and update the databases of contacts developed by the project for ports, SMEs and investors, as well as available funding instruments.

IV – Specific messages to Start-ups, SMEs, ports and investors acting to boost ports as hubs of the sustainable blue economy

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<th>The AspBAN partners and Atlantic Arc Commission Regions recommend to Start-ups, SMEs evolving in the field of sustainable blue economy, ports and investors to join the AspBAN community to benefit from a wide range of contacts to support their ambitions to implement a green and digital transitions in ports.</th>
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<td>a. The AspBAN project by providing a pool of ports, Start-ups and SMEs, as well as investors is not only a network of contacts but also provides concrete possibility to receive tailor-made advice, access to sources such as the Investor Handbook or the Financial opportunities database;</td>
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<td>b. Additionally, it offers to SMEs, Start-ups, ports and investors an opportunity to benefit from a true Twinning programme linking together innovative solutions/products and the needs, challenges and innovation priorities of the Ports of the Atlantic;</td>
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<td>c. In a longer term, this consolidated community will also be able to co-design this “EU Flagship Programme for Blue Acceleration in Ports” with new or adapted instruments to boost innovation in ports;</td>
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<td>d. For all these advantages, we recommend that interesting ports join the AspBAN Atlantic Blue</td>
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Economy Ports Clusters Network whose main objective is to establish a dynamic Atlantic Port network to promote innovation among the smart Atlantic Ports with a special focus on small and medium ports of the Atlantic area;

e. We also recommend that innovators in the fields of Green Shipping, Smart Ports and Logistic, Marine Renewable Energy, Coastal Tourism, Sustainable Fisheries, Aquaculture and others Blue economy sectors, join the Atlantic Blue Investment Cluster and gain free access to our EU experts, investors, officials, key players to help you match with their respective interests.

f. Other stakeholders included public authorities can become “AspBAN Strategic Partner Network” to be in touch with this pool of experts and investors and evaluate how this network and concrete actions can benefit to better policy-making in the field of maritime affairs and final beneficiaries.
PARTNERS

coordinator:

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Associação da Economia do Mar

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