Atlantic Arc Commission’s Hub meetings

5 June 2019 - Brussels

Minutes

I - Marine Renewable Energies Working Group

1. Marine Renewable Energy and NECPs

The CPMR made a questionnaire to gather regions opinions on the National Energy and Climate Plans elaborated by the Member States, in the framework of the EU Clean Energy Package. The first results show that the level implication of Regions in the draft differs from one country to another, notably because of varying level of regional competences but also because of the short consultation delays. The Atlantic respondents demonstrated a common political will to development MRE in the Atlantic area, while the NECPs elaborated by Member States show a substantial lack of ambitious and detailed measures for MRE.

The Atlantic Arc Commission also contributed to include Marine Renewable Energy as a key priority for the future Atlantic Action Plan. For this reason, the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat would like to suggest to work further on this issue through the elaboration of a document (declaration, brochure or technical note) developing certain messages and showcasing strengths of regions to develop MRE projects. The document would be elaborated before December 2019 (date of the finalization of the draft NECPs) and discussed during our General Assembly in Porto, 14 November.

2. Perspectives of work - Proposals of the Basque Country


Last meeting of the MRE Working group was held in the framework of the WindEurope annual event in November 2018. Very few Atlantic Arc Regions participated in this meeting, while it was quite an effort for the Basque Country to organise it. The Basque country suggested to improve the mailing list of the MRE group to enlarge it to experts in MRE. The Basque Country recalled the main purpose of this meeting was to reflect on avenues of collaboration with the S3 Interregional Partnership on MRE, co-lead by Basque and Scotland.

Ainhoa Azarloza also presented a project proposal for the H2020 programme: a pre-commercial public procurement on wave technology. Partners from Scotland, Canaries Islands and Portugal are already involved but French partners are missing. Ainhoa Azarloza urged the regions willing to participate to notify it.

She also invited the Regions to participate to the Final Event of the OPERA project on 19 June. It deals with innovative way to capture wave energy. She suggested that the group should aim at presenting a project with the Atlantic Arc seal.
3. Debate with Member Regions

Claire Le Tertre, representative of Brittany Region, asked whether the results of CPMR questionnaire on NECP and the Atlantic Arc Commission document will be carried out in coordination. She details that the messages should be chosen carefully as in France, national calls trigger to competition between stakeholders from different Regions.

Aude Korfer, delegate of Brittany Region in Brussels, underlines that one of the messages could be the maintain of the Ocean ERANET which benefit to Atlantic Regions. She asked whether the JRC study on MRE value chain had been released.

Ainhoa Azarloza suggested to reflect on Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3). The new programming period will introduce a component 5 which will foster interregional cooperation on S3 and thus new source of funding for MRE projects. Besides, she highlighted the fact that neither NECPs nor the Country report elaborated by the Commission to orient the Structural funds explicitly details the need for MRE development.

Ludovic Lareynie, representative of Nouvelle Aquitaine Region, expressed the wish from the Region to work on a MRE project, as is already the case in Blue Gift.

Conclusions

The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat took note of the suggestions and asked the Member Regions to comment on the draft paper which will be sent out ahead of the Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly in Porto. The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat will contact the JRC to connect its work on MREs.

The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat asked the Member Regions on the ideas of projects that could be developed under the Atlantic Arc Commission. Once proposals received, the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat will pass a summary of a project idea to its Member Regions and possibilities of financing.

II - Extraordinary discussion on Climate change

1. Introduction

Katie Cavell, Executive Secretaty of the Atlantic Arc Commission, opened the extra meeting on Climate change. She recalled that it is not a new working group, as its creation has first to be validated in the General Assembly but rather an exploratory work on the EU Solidarity Fund, as requested by the Regions of Asturias and Cantabria. Indeed, Cantabria and Asturias suffered major storms earlier this year and wrote a letter to the Presidency to address this issue as they were not able to get financial support from EUSF. The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat produced a note on EUSF and looked at it critically. While Atlantic storms can get more intense, and coasts are attacked by sea rising, the EU Solidarity fund could be improved to tackle this challenge. A broader reflection on the specificities of the Atlantic area regarding the climate change challenge could also be reflected.

› Technical note on the EU Solidarity Fund (only for members)

2. Johannes Wachter (DG REGIO) - Presentation of the EU Solidarity Fund

The EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) was created in since 2002, and was used on several occasion in the Atlantic, for recovery of damages caused by Atlantic storms (Xynthia), inland floods (2009 in the UK and Ireland) and forest fires.

The financial assistance is limited to recovery of essential infrastructures and only intervenes when a Region or a Member State is overwhelmed and cannot simply recover the damages with its own means (subsidiarity principle). It is a tool outside the EU budget which amounts 600 million euros which can be mobilized at the extent that is needed. The N-1 unspent money can be used in case of damages the following year. The fund is delivered after approval of the European Parliament and Council after evaluation of the Commission with the help of the Joint Research Centre (JRC).

For a Region to apply to the fund, the regional damage has to exceed 1.5% of regions GDP. The region then has to ask the Member States to apply for the fund (more information on Atlantic Arc Commission technical
It can receive up to 2.5% of the calculated damage. The rational is to give a differentiate amount of money for poor/rich regions. The biggest amount of money was delivered to Italy after the earthquake in 2018 but 2/3 of all cases are floods, storms.

2014 discussions on its reform mentioned the extension of scope of the fund, lower threshold to apply, or conditionality to oblige member states to meet minimum standards in prevention. An evaluation of EUSF was carried out and released in May 2019. However, not change in the implementation rules is planned yet. Only the budget amount is currently discussed within the MFF negotiations.

3. Debate with the members

Inma Valencia, Director of the Cantabria Region Office in Brussels, recalled the major storms that her Region suffered from earlier in the year. She mentioned that Cantabria Region already worked on the EU Solidarity Fund when it had the presidency of the Atlantic Arc Commission. It suggested the possibility for Regions to apply jointly and asked whether the European Commission had considered this option.

Johannes Wachter, DG REGIO, answered positively on the possibility to group a single application but warned on the difficulty of the exercise as the Regions need to calculate the threshold, on the basis of different GDPs. This also complicates the calculation on the amount of money distributed to each Region. The fund is based on a logic which is to differentiate the use of the fund according to each Member States and Regions capacities. A transnational application would mean a complete change in the logic of the fund. However, he underlined that it could work for a cross-border joint application as it was the case for Galicia (Spain) and Norte (Portugal) when they experienced forest fires. The idea is to not punish a region which is not on the good side of the border.

Inma Valencia, Director of the Cantabria Region Office in Brussels, asked why it should be difficult for two Regions of the same country to apply together when two Regions of different countries managed.

Johannes Wachter, DG REGIO, answered that impacts on Galicia and Norte were dealt as separate events, related to two different national contexts. There was not common application. In the case of Portugal, the threshold exceeded while it was not the case for Galicia, for the same meteorological event.

Claire Le Tertre, for Brittany Region would like to support further discussions on this topic of interest for the Brittany region.

Conclusions

If the Atlantic Arc Commission Member Regions decide to go further on this topic, the Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat could provide advice on how to deal with this issue and maybe look at climate issue more generally. NB: this needs to be decided in the Atlantic Arc Commission statutory meetings.

III - Innovation Working Group

1. Introduction

Ludovic Lareynie, for the Nouvelle Aquitaine Region, gave a brief presentation on the challenge of skills gap in Atlantic maritime sectors. It recalled that the Innovation group already developed a project, the BBMBC project, in 2016-2018, to tackle skills gap in the blue biotechnology sector. The Nouvelle Aquitaine Region would like to propose the development of a new project with three activities:

- An awareness raising campaign for young people on the attractiveness and potential related to marine activities;
- A Benchmark on existing and future maritime job in the EU;
- An International MOOC focusing on challenges and aspects of Blue Growth through training models;

In this respect, the Nouvelle Aquitaine developed a questionnaire to be sent to all the Regions to seek their feedback on this project idea. Notably, Regions would have to define the sector they want to focus on, ideas of activities that can be introduced in the project. The Region Nouvelle Aquitaine recalled skills gap is the priority of the Atlantic Strategy, and has already identified stakeholders to get involved.

➔ Click HERE to consult the questionnaire
2. Presentation of a transnational project regarding blue skills

Ludovic Lareynie presented a project application (Ocean I 3), made under the POCTEFA programme on improving skills to tackle the challenge of plastic pollution. It amounts 260 000€ and should last 2 years. The Basque Country University and the University of Bordeaux are partners and aim at developing actions tackling the following challenges:

- Development of the economic offer;
- Promotions of students’ mobility;
- Creation of a common degree;
- Contribution to the development of the EU research community;
- Strengthening of the RIS3 strategy based on promotion of territorial innovation;
- International projection of Universities.

The project is linked to Ocean Campus which derives from a demand of socio-economic actors from the cross-border area between Spain and France, to develop academic skills in the maritime sectors.

The project will have three dimensions: Learning, Research and Raising awareness. On the Learning element, it will analyse the possibility to transfer classes already existing in both universities regarding blue skills topic and develop a summer class. It will create a network associating companies to better know what profiles and skills they would require. It could be transposed to the Atlantic area.

3. Debate

Elise Wattrelot recalls the successes of the previous project, the BBMBC project, which has received the validation of the University of La Rochelle for another two years. This new project would capitalize the BBMBC project and is in line with the priority of the Pays de la Loire Presidency. We will contact DG EAC to explore the possibility of the being financed by the Sector Skill Alliance, as the INTERREG Atlantic Area programme will not publish new calls for this programming period.

Conclusions

The Atlantic Arc Commission Secretariat will send the questionnaire to the Regions and explore with DG EAC the possibility to be financed by Erasmus programme. Regions interested are asked to answer the questionnaire within a month.

IV - Transport Working Group

1. Presentations on priorities of the Atlantic Arc Commission Transport Working Group

Juan José Sota, Regional Minister of Cantabria Region, chair of the Transport Working group, recalled the purpose of the group to improve Atlantic connectivity from Ireland to south of Spain. The Trans-European Network of Transport is an important tool to develop our territories. The CEF negotiations have included improvements for the Atlantic connectivity, already in the European Commission’s proposal but also in the partial agreement of the European Parliament and the Council. However, various sections are missing, and the TEN-T negotiations are window of opportunities to further voice our messages. Notably, Cantabria defends the inclusion in the core network of the rail connection between Santander and Bilbao for freight and passengers. This project will improve competitiveness of the concerned regions which represents 27% of the Spanish GDP, better link the Atlantic to the Mediterranean Sea and encourage the modal shift from the road where 50 000 vehicles pass. He also mentioned other sections defended by the Atlantic Arc, such as the inclusion of Britany in the core network, the connection with Ireland (and its north west area) after Brexit, or the inclusion of La Rochelle port in the core network.

He recalled that the commitment of the Cantabria Region as chair of the group was to further promote the territorial cohesion objective in the EU transport policy. The criteria of volume to judge whether a port should be part of the core network is not satisfactory as it does not take into account the strategic dimension of port regarding their territories. He underlined that the Atlantic Arc of transport should be both Green and Blue, to exploit the full potential of the blue economy.
He recalled that Regions of the Atlantic Arc answered the questionnaire developed by CPMR to consolidate a common answer to the European Commission’s consultation on TEN-T. They also participated in the revision of the Atlantic Strategy Action Plan to integrate the objective of Transport Connectivity where they request to create a Transport Connectivity group in the governance of the Atlantic Strategy and allow the participation of the Atlantic Regions in the Atlantic Corridor Forum, notably through the participation of the AAC.

He concluded that Cantabria will pass the leadership of the group to the Basque Country and will remain an active member of the Group, notably helping in the organisation of a workshop on the TEN-T revision in favour of a strong Atlantic Arc of transport, planned for the end of the year.

**Antonio Aiz Salazar**, Regional Minister in charge of Transport for the Basque Government, highlighted the orientations that the Basque Country wish to give to the Atlantic Arc Commission Transport working group. He recalled the words pronounced by Jacques Delors for the White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment in 1993 which say that congestion of the transport network is a great cost to European productivity and competitiveness in the 21st century. The project to have a Blue and green Atlantic Arc of Transport, which is sustainable in economic and environmental terms, fully embrace these words.

He underlined that since 1995 and the decision of the first priority project, the Atlantic rail corridor have experienced lot of delays and Member States need to reach the first objectives fixed. The prioritisation of the completion of this corridor is necessary. The rail continuity as well as the interoperability of network should be fulfilled. In addition, a further support to port-rail connection is crucial to the Atlantic territories.

He concluded highlighting that cooperation between Atlantic region is crucial to make the most of the TEN-T revision.

**Lucas Bosser**, Director in charge of Transport at CPMR, gave an overview on EU Transport agenda. He recalled the participation of the CPMR in the revision of the CEF regulation and the Atlantic amendments which successfully passed. The CPMR plans to answer the EU consultation on the TEN-T revision (2021-2023). Key messages are built upon the answer to a prior questionnaire sent to regions. The Atlantic Regions brought forward a series of sections to upgrade, with key messages on how to improve the TEN-T regulation and which will be integrated to the answer.

See [Lucas Bosser’s Powerpoint presentation](#).

The CPMR Political Bureau in June 2019 will held a discussion on the answer to the consultations.

2. Debate

**Elise Wattrelot**, Policy Analyst, recalled that the workshop mentioned by Mr Sota is meant to showcase the Atlantic key messages on the TEN-T consultation. This event is part of the targeted consultation that the Commission wants to carry out after the public consultation. Mr Carlo Secchi has already been contacted to participate in this event. The AAC Secretariat is committed to organise this event for second semester.

**Marion Chauveau**, for the Nouvelle Aquitaine, ensured the participation of the region in the work launched by CPMR. One of the main messages is the integration of the port of La Rochelle in the Core Network.

### Conclusions

The CPMR will finalized its answer on the Commission’s consultation on the TEN-T Revision (discussion at the Political Bureau in Donegal).

The Atlantic Arc Commission will organise a workshop on TEN-T revision and the Atlantic connectivity.