DECLARATION approved by the Atlantic Arc Commission Member Regions

Wednesday 9 June 2021

The Atlantic Arc Regions, listed below, that are members of the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission gathered for their 2021 Annual General Meeting:

CCDR do Alentejo (PT)
Junta de Andalucía (ES)
Principado de Asturias (ES)
Région Bretagne (FR)
Gobierno de Cantabria (ES)
Xunta de Galicia (ES)
CCDR de Lisboa e Vale do Tejo (PT)
Gobierno de Navarra (ES)
CCDR do Norte (PT)
Northern and Western Regional Assembly (IRL)
Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine (FR)
Région Pays de la Loire (FR)
Gobierno Vasco (ES)
Welsh Government (UK)
Key messages to the EU institutions and national governments to enhance the sustainable recovery of the Atlantic Arc

After fifteen months of global pandemic, the Atlantic seaboard has to recover from the COVID-19 crisis economically and socially. Overcoming this situation will involve a paradigm shift guided by ecological, demographical, social, technological and digital transitions. This context adds to the challenges experienced by Atlantic territories due to the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. The departure of the UK from the EU threatens the cohesion of the Atlantic area but also provides an improved rational for Atlantic collaboration.

These difficulties are in addition to the downgraded socio-economic situation, already evident before the crisis. The Atlantic Regions are clearly lagging behind some other European regions in terms of development. The adverse effects of globalization, digitalization and climate change, among other factors, have contributed to create an ever-greater concentration of wealth on the expense of many Atlantic regions. It is worth noting that comparing regional eligibility for cohesion policy between 2014-2020 and 2021-2027, shows almost all the Atlantic regions have been downgraded to a “region in transition” status or “less developed region” status.

In this pressured context, the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission Regions strongly insist on the importance of solidarity and cooperation to the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. These values have defined the different regional responses to this crisis and lie at the heart of our common Atlantic Arc political project. More than ever, Europe must be the continent of social cohesion and prosperity for all and we thus applauds the 2021 Porto declaration of the European Council.

The Atlantic Arc Commission reaffirms its pledge to work towards a more socially responsible future for the Atlantic Area inside and outside the EU and calls for greater attention from the EU institutions and national governments to the sustainable development of the Atlantic Arc Area, using an integrated approach and a multi-level dialogue on key policies and programmes relevant to the Atlantic Arc Regions.

The Atlantic Arc Commission (AAC) members:

1) **Welcome**, the launch and the implementation of Atlantic Action Plan 2.0 of the Atlantic Maritime Strategy, following the Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Conference organised by the French Presidency and the Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region in November 2020. It brought several improvements, including the participation of the Atlantic Arc Commission as adviser to the Atlantic Strategy Committee and the opportunity for Atlantic regional stakeholders to participate in the coordination of the different Pillars of the Strategy. This innovation enables our territories to contribute actively through their efforts and knowledge to a more
comprehensive development of the Atlantic Maritime Strategy and to better synergies for the development of joint projects in the Atlantic maritime basin.

2) **Support** the possibility for non-EU states to participate in the Atlantic Maritime Strategy, to create the conditions for a dialogue with non-member states and Regions and nations on the sustainable management of the Atlantic area.

3) **Further ask** that participating States to ensure the Atlantic Maritime Strategy has a positive impact on the ground, notably a series of new practices within the Atlantic Strategy Committee (ASC) such as at least one meeting per year of the ASC dedicated to the regional development of the Atlantic territories, as well as the promotion of dedicated funding and improved communication for the benefit of cooperation projects which are relevant to the Atlantic seaboard.

4) **Highlight** the example of the recently approved ATLAZUL project (Interreg V-A Spain-Portugal, POCTEP 2014-20) which gathers regions and entities of the Atlantic Area to boost innovation in blue growth, increase knowledge on blue growth and foster the development of synergies between the maritime and terrestrial areas, while promoting the Atlantic Maritime Alliance.

5) **Reiterate** the messages of the Atlantic Arc Commission Political declaration for an Atlantic Macro-Region, which requested the Atlantic member states to call on the Council for a European Commission mandate to develop an Atlantic macro-regional strategy to harness the positives effects of Macro-regions for the Atlantic Area. In particular, this instrument will make it possible to strengthen the political and cooperation dimension within our maritime basin, while better involving the regional level, gaining greater visibility on Atlantic challenges at European level, and connecting maritime challenges with inland challenges.

6) **Stress** that the strengthening of territorial cohesion in the Atlantic goes hand in hand with meeting the EU’s target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They **consider** that this objective can be achieved by strengthening the multi-level governance on climate policy, harvesting the expertise and practices of regional authorities. They also **highlight** notably the need for incentivizing the sustainability dimension of regional specialisations, on both adaptation and mitigation measures, as it is essential to act jointly on these two aspects, especially in coastal territories where risks are prevalent.

7) **Welcome** the development of Next Generation EU funds, and other new instruments and programmes such as the Just Transition Fund (JTF), the instrument for Interregional Innovation Investments (I3), and the Brexit Adjustment Reserve (BAR); **Request** however that the European Commission and Member States reinforce cooperation with Atlantic regions so that funding supports the specific needs of their territories to ensure a regional and local appropriation of the financial opportunities.

8) **Recommend** in particular that the European Commission offers adequate financial support to regions to identify opportunities to foster the green recovery of tourism, a key sector of the Atlantic regions economic fabric heavily affected by the health crisis.

9) **Reiterate** the Atlantic Arc Commission Declaration on the revision of TEN-T regulation, which highlights, the importance of the completion of the Atlantic TEN-T Core Network corridor, the need for a real Atlantic Arc of transport connecting the Atlantic regions as well as the development of the strategic role of ports, not only not only as transport hubs attracting specific freight volumes and numbers of passengers but also but also as key actors for the development of the Regions through their contribution to economic dynamism of other maritime sectors. **Recall** in this respect the Atlantic Arc Commission’s active participation in the creation of the
Atlantic Smart Port Blue Acceleration Network (AspBan project) which has a transatlantic outreach.

10) **Recall** the important Atlantic Arc Commission’s [contribution](#) to the 2021-2027 INTERREG Atlantic Area programme public consultation, and **Consider** that it should have had a more prominent role in the discussion on the future programme. They additionally **Ask** the representatives of the Task Force elaborating the future programme to take fully into account this contribution in the writing of the operational programme in order to meet the main challenges of the Atlantic coast and its basin strategy.

11) **Welcome** the development of the Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy as it gives a new impetus to an integrated approach towards the development of maritime sectors which are important for the Atlantic Regions economic ecosystem. This integrated approach to Blue Economy should be streamlined in all the policy developments.

12) **Welcome** the references to the role of coastal regions in the deployment of the sustainable blue economy in this new Strategy, in particular **Suggest** coastal regions take part in the Blue Forum for users of the sea created with the EU’s Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future or in the identification of protected areas, as Regions are pivotal for gathering key users of the sea and coastal areas.

13) **Highlight** that the development of an external dimension to the Sustainable Blue Economy is important to ensure that EU Atlantic Regions including islands and non-EU regions particularly UK regions and nations, or territories under British sovereignty, can join forces to protect our shared coastal environment while enhancing their socio-economic prosperity. **Welcome** in this respect the Pilot Project submitted to the European Parliament to develop a forerunner of transatlantic cooperation scheme, in which they expect the Atlantic Regions to play a key role.

14) **Propose** the European Commission to conduct a study on the blue dimension of the different EU programmes (Recovery and Resilience Facility, Horizon Europe, Erasmus, ESF+, I3, BAR, etc.) and counts on the support of the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission in this respect. **Suggest** in particular a close partnership with the European Commission to identify Smart Specialisation Strategies in Regions relevant to Blue Growth and explore possible ways to further enhance their blue and green dimensions.

15) **Promote** a focus on blue economy in reindustrialization policies and skills policies, and in particular in the different economic ecosystems targeted by the EU Industrial Strategy and the EU Pact for Skills Initiative. In this respect, **highlights** as a good example the establishment of an Offshore Energy Pact for Skills. Its roll-out at local level should be supported with appropriate incentives from the European Commission.

16) **Highlight also** that this integrated approach to Blue Economy is lacking in some recent policy developments such as the Roadmap on the Action Plan to Preserve Fisheries Resources. The Roadmap unfortunately only focuses on the impact of fisheries activities on the marine environment, leaving behind the assessment of impacts of other types of activities developed at sea or sources of marine pollutions (plastics, oil spill, etc.). **Request** the European Commission to assess also the economic dimension of fishing and its impact in the economy on the Regions.

17) **Consider** that the design and implementation of maritime spatial plans should nurture all the policy developments on sustainable blue economy and that they should be carried out within the framework of multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance, including cross-border cooperation with non-EU countries. The Atlantic Arc Commission members therefore **call** on the Atlantic States to take into account the specific needs of the coastal regions and give them a role in decision-making during their implementation.
18) **Feel** it is imperative, that the review of the Common Fisheries Policy planned in 2022 should trigger a thorough and bold reflection on the necessary legislative and funding conditions necessary for the fisheries and aquaculture sectors to thrive in Atlantic regions, including with respect to the ecological and energy transition as well as the social conditions: renewal of generations, training and re-skilling, etc.

The Atlantic Arc Commission is one of the six Geographical Commissions of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe, and its action, although specific to the requirements of its Member Regions, is part of this more general framework.

The Atlantic Arc Commission was established in 1989 in Faro (Algarve, Portugal). It covers five States (France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom) in a territory spreading from Andalucía to Scotland. With some 60 million inhabitants, it represents 12% of the European population. The presidency of the Atlantic Arc Commission is currently held by the Basque Government (Spain).