Proposition for a Task force to explore a macrorregional approach for the Atlantic

I welcome the proposal of the AAC Secretariat regarding the creation of a Reflection Group on Atlantic Cooperation.

As you know, we have been working on the reflection for the Atlantic area to become a Macro-region for some time now.

A few months ago, the Basque Country first presented an approach document to the subject in which we exposed the opportunity to make a proposal for an Atlantic Macro-region within this Atlantic Arc Commission. Subsequently, we also presented to this Commission a technical document in which we explained the advantages of evolving towards a Macro-region, the importance of the moment and the context for doing so, and we even anticipated some guidelines on the governance that establishing a Macro-region could entail; the latter aspect has always been a concern for many regions of the AAC but it is also a subject of vital importance in the improvement of the Atlantic Strategy.

The time for an Atlantic MR is right for, among others, two fundamental reasons: Brexit and the new forms of cooperation with the United Kingdom that will have to be articulated from now and the negotiation of the European Union's Multiannual Financial Framework.

The advantages of a Macro-region are clear:

- Greater entity and political visibility, with what this implies
- Greater possibility of access to European funding, given the better alignment with European funds
- Enabling the association of third countries (which is a relevant issue in the case of the United Kingdom because of Brexit)
- Extend areas of cooperation beyond maritime cooperation to territorial areas
- To have multi-level governance and the full participation of the regions in it.

In the Comillas Political Declaration of 2018, the Atlantic Arc Commission agreed on its intention to deepen an Atlantic Macro-region approach. At the Plenary Meeting in Madeira, the Basque Government presented the work carried out to date and invited the regions of the CAA to "board this ship".

After several discussions on the issue, a decision was made in our meeting last 5th of June in Brussels to set up a specific temporary task force to deep in the macrorregional approach.

With this purpose, you all have received a short explanatory document about what the objectives of this task force would be. Of course, every
interested Atlantic region and island is very welcome to join the task group.

- The Basque Country is convinced about the current timing to be the best for this reflection, taking into account the negotiations of the next MFF,
- The opportunity to shape from the atlantic regions and member states the new approach to a more geopolitical Europe, e.g. when it comes to define policies such as the new green deal and digitalisation,
- and all the uncertainties that Brexit will unfortunately bring to all of us. A re-thinking of our cooperation will be needed.

Besides, we consider that our cooperation has to be reinforced both in its maritime dimension and also in the territorial, in many crucial areas such as climate change or innovation.

On the other hand, the current governance of our cooperation will need to be improved, as it has been widely recognised within the Atlantic Arc Commission.

Last but not least the Atlantic MR is fully compatible with the approach of the Atlantic Macro-regional strategy and represents an evolution through it.

We propose the following working methodology and a calendar for the task force:

In the time frame of 6-7 months.

1. The Task Force will identify the regions willing to work proactively and constructively in the task force. We suggest that regions from all the Atlantic MMSS should be represented. Two representatives from each region (one at the capital level and another one at Brussel office level) should be identified.
2. A written proposal should be submitted for discussion after the hearing and auditions to experts and EC representatives, attending thematic meetings.
3. The final goal of the Task Force is to convey a document to be sent by the regions of the AAC, on a voluntary based, and the AAC if adopted politically by the AG of the AAC, to all EU institutions and Central Governments of the Atlantic Member States asking them to negotiate a detailed and consistent mandate to be adopted by the European Council in October 2020, during the German presidency.
4. A group of policy influencing will be designated within the Task force to work with MEPS, EC and other organisations on a bilateral level.

The calendar and topical meetings:

- **Kick off meeting in December.** Purpose: to identify common areas to work for a future MR, capitalizing the revision of the Atlantic Maritime Strategy, but including territorial place based policies where a macro-regional dimension, as functional territorial dimension, could be exploited to tackle economic stagnation, climate change and rising territorial inequalities. Common priorities reflected in the S3 strategies of the Atlantic regions, are to be explored together with related policies such as industrial policies, digitalization, the meaning of the new green deal for Atlantic regions. Representatives from think tanks, and JRC, etc., are to be invited.

- **Second meeting in February about alignment of funds, future MFF and example of other MRs.** Invite a person in charge of the MRs in DG REGIO, Component 5, and other programs and initiatives where a macro regional dimension makes sense to identify flagship initiatives (e.g. 3rd pillar of the Horizon Europe).

- **Third meeting in April on governance.** Invite Alpine / Baltic, as well as North Sea / Carpathians, to compare with other spaces that are working in the same direction.

- **June, last meeting with attachés responsible for finance in the PermReps** to discuss the results of the previous meetings and the possibility to draft a mandate from the Council to the Commission for an Atlantic MR of the EU.

**I ask you for your positive vote** to stablish a six month temporary task force to explore what an Atlantic macrorregional strategy would bring to our regions and, of course, **I warmly invite you all to join** our work within this task group in the coming months.