



Commission des Iles ▶ Islands Commission ▶ Ö-kommissionen ▶ Επιτροπή των Νησιών

Comisión de las Islas ▶ Comissão das Ilhas ▶ CommissionedelleIsole

SaarteKomisjon ▶ Kummissjonita'Gúejjer ▶ Ø Kommission

On behalf of its members listed below, the Islands Commission of the CPMR, gathered for its 36th Annual General Meeting in Rhodes (South Aegean, GR) on 19-20 May 2016, adopted the following Declaration:

Açores (PT), Baleares (ES), Bornholm (DK), Canarias (ES), Crete (Obs, GR), Cyprus (District Offices), Gotland (SE), Gozo (MT), Ionia Nissia (GR), Madeira (PT), Notio Aigaio (GR), Polynésie Française (FR), Saaremaa/Hiiumaa (EE), Orkney (UK), Shetland (UK), Voreio Aigaio (Obs, GR)

FINAL DECLARATION

Cohesion Policy

1. While the implementation process for EU Cohesion Policy for 2014 – 2020 is well underway, regional GDP statistics clearly show that the impact of the financial crisis is still present on many islands. The forthcoming technical review of the Structural Funds allocations will make some adjustments without increasing the total size of the budget; yet in view of the post-2020 period, the spotlight still lies on the forthcoming proposal of the European Commission for the Multi-Annual Financial Framework's mid-term review, due by the end of 2016.

The Island Regional Authorities:

2. Are very concerned about the rise of regional disparities between European regions, a trend which has been exacerbated by the effects of the financial crisis. The latest publication of EUROSTAT regional GDP figures for 2014 are testimony to the increasing development gap between the centre and the periphery of Europe.
3. Stress that if the latest regional GDP statistics were used to calculate regional eligibility for Structural Funds (2012, 2013 and 2014 average, as opposed to the 2007, 2008 and 2009 baseline), six island regional authorities would move down one category, i.e. from "more developed" to "transition" regions or from "transition" to "less developed" (Ionian Islands, North Aegean, South Aegean, Crete, Sardinia, Cyprus) and one island and outermost regional authority (Madeira) would move down two categories, i.e. from "more developed" to "less developed". Among them, the regions of South Aegean and Madeira face the highest drop in regional GDP in Europe (30% and 29% respectively). In some Regions, as in the case of Madeira, their eligibility has been affected by statistical anomalies due to the calculation of regional GDP, as it has been demonstrated by the application of the European System of national and regional accounts in the European Union ("ESA 2010").
4. Consider that Cohesion Policy is the best suited European policy to address islands' challenges, independently of their classification within the policy as more or less developed regions, or as regions in transition.

5. Highlight the fact that indicators that go beyond measuring economic production and that better reflect islands socio-economic specificities, such as the regional competitiveness index (which comprises a suite of 73 different indicators), although needing to be further improved, only confirm the trend of growing regional disparities.
6. Consider that more socio-economic and environmental data and studies on islands within a sea basin, complementing economic indicators in order to better describe their specificities and create more cooperation opportunities, would be useful and therefore welcome.
7. Pending the European Commission proposals for the Mid-term Review of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework and the post-2020 programming period, they are alarmed about the European Commission's continuous lack of attention to territorial cohesion and islands and outermost regions in particular.

In light of this, they:

8. Welcome that the European Parliament in its report of 28 October 2015 on [Cohesion Policy and review of the Europe 2020 strategy](#) stresses that cohesion policy is the main EU instrument covering all regions for investment in the real economy and for solidarity; and that cohesion policy is the investment framework needed for the Europe 2020 strategy, without being simply a tool for its implementation.
9. Strongly reject the points made in the 6th Cohesion Report ([page 203](#)), that areas covered by Article 174 of the [TFEU](#) such as islands are not worthy of additional funding to compensate them for their geographical handicaps, and that inherent characteristics, such as remoteness, can also be a stimulus to growth. Such statements are unfortunate and they not only contradict directly the principle of solidarity enshrined in the EU Treaties and the territorial dimension of Cohesion Policy, but they also misinterpret the argument that cohesion policy should compensate **for the impact of such inherent characteristics** on island territories, which **impede growth**.
10. Recall that in the [6th Cohesion Report](#) it is recognised that *[Regions'] 'disadvantages' need to be taken into account when designing the shape of the policy to be pursued*.
11. Request that the upcoming 7th Cohesion Report reflects in a more straightforward manner the wording as well as the spirit of Art. 174 TFEU, so that particular attention is paid to island and outermost regions suffering from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps, and that such disadvantages are taken into account when designing and implementing EU policies.
12. Reiterate that outermost regions face a significant range of unique and immutable structural constraints in the European context which are barriers to their development and to improvement of their levels of competitiveness, which require the adoption of specific measures, especially in the framework of Cohesion Policy, as recognised in Article 349 of the TFEU.

Call on the European Institutions:

13. to properly and fully consider the challenges of island and outermost regional authorities – accessibility and the resulting territorial overcosts being one of them – within the emerging debate on the post-2020 Cohesion Policy, and to ensure that Articles 174 and 349 of the TFEU are reflected in the policy. This would entail out of the box thinking and reflection on specific provisions within cohesion policy, applicable either at National or European level, which could compensate for island territories' and outermost regions' disadvantages.
14. To consider establishing Operational Programmes of Territorial Cooperation for more sea basins, following the example of the Operational Programme for the Macaronesia.

- 15.** With this respect and **in view of the post-2020 period** they have come up with **food for thought for a more island-friendly cohesion policy** and in concrete terms **they call on the European Commission to:**
- a.** Invest in **higher quality data** in support of not solely economic indicators that can analyse the specific situation of island territories regions and archipelagos and use them as **complementary or corrective indicators** for the purposes of Cohesion Policy.
 - b.** Foresee the **earmarking at National level of Cohesion Policy funds for island territories**, an approach that applies already within ERDF for sustainable urban development and other specific thematic objectives.
 - c.** Consider the introduction of a **programme of innovative actions for islands** for the post-2020 period, coupled with the establishment of a special unit representing islands at DG REGIO, aiming at island-proof European policy and legislation, while ensuring the continuity and reinforcement of the unit representing the outermost regions.
 - d. Strengthen the provisions of Partnership Agreements** with the Member States in order to be able to assess the territorial dimension of the operational programmes prior to their approval, this being one of the core elements of cohesion policy that would include consideration of the specific natural and demographic handicaps of islands.
- 16.** Declare themselves at the disposal of the European Commission as potential interlocutors in a constructive dialogue on the basis of the above proposals, with the aim to address the impact of their geographical handicaps in their competitiveness and growth.



State Aids

- 17.** While the State Aids policy reform launched in 2012 is still missing some elements to be completed, potential new changes in the policy lay ahead in view of the new programming period. An element that still remains to be seen is what the impact of the declared approach of the new European Commission will be to “only focus on big things” on future State Aids policy and on its territorial dimension.

The Island Regional authorities:

- 18.** Remark that State Aids are a very useful tool for island territories and outermost regions to address overcosts related to the challenges that they face due to their isolation and/or remoteness, such as small markets and lack of economies of scale in a series of sectors, such as for instance transport, energy efficiency in relation to energy poverty, digital connectivity, etc.
- 19.** Taking note of paragraph 6 of the [resolution on the Special Situation of Islands](#) adopted by the European Parliament on 4 February 2016, note that flexibility in the implementation of special tax arrangements by Member States, in particular for regions which need a particular treatment, such as remote or insular regions, is key and should be continued.
- 20.** Welcome the process for the addition of aid for ports and airports to the General Block Exemption Regulation, for which notification of the European Commission will no longer be necessary.

In light of this:

Call on Member States

- 21.** To apply Article 175 of the TFEU, and use the full possibilities provided by the State Aids regulation to compensate, wherever possible, for the impacts of insularity within their territories.

Call on the European Commission

- 22.** On the basis of Article 174 of the TFEU to consider introducing in the guidelines on regional aid a system of operating aids that would compensate for the additional transport costs that island territories face, as it is already the case for outermost regions and areas with low population density. Such a system should protect residents from additional costs resulting from tourism seasonality.
- 23.** To consider inclusion of all islands under Article 107.3.c and to adapt the respective population quota to the concerned Member States. They recall that statistical indicators used for eligibility under Article 107.3.c do not adequately reflect the territorial constraints of islands, and, more particularly, the case of the smaller islands that suffer from a lack of economies of scale and a reduced market size.
- 24.** To consider an exemption in the General Block Exemption Regulation of certain types of operating aids to airports and start-up aids to airlines, as the latter are often essential to maintain connectivity of peripheral, outermost and island regions.
- 25.** To consider applying differentiated ceilings to *de minimis* aid depending on the nature of the territories, based on the provisions set out in Article 174 of the TFEU.
- 26.** In view of the current consultation on provisions to [simplify implementation of unproblematic state support for ports and airports](#), to:
 - a. Article 56a. 4:** Properly adapt the distances of 100km or 60 minutes "*travelling time by car, bus, train or high-speed train*" for the case of islands, archipelagos and outermost Regions, as these figures clearly do not take into account land discontinuity. They recall that in the guidelines on state aid such boundaries around airports are considered as variables depending on the characteristics of the airport, including its location.
 - b. Article 4 §1.ee and Article 56b:** Extend the threshold of 120 million euros for eligible costs to all ports, as the discrimination in ports of the core and comprehensive network goes against the principles of accessibility, particularly since ports in the comprehensive network also contribute to the realization of the trans-European transport network.
 - c. Article 56b §2.d:** Include maintenance dredging in the costs eligible for investment, as this activity is vital for the proper functioning of the infrastructure even more so than for its competitiveness, and to extend the notification exemption for dredging works also to those for maintenance purposes, which are currently excluded.
 - d. Article 56b §2:** Exempt from notification industrial activities within the perimeter of ports in the sector of Marine Renewable Energies, since port facilities, being a tool for economic development, accommodate a growing share of non-transportation activities and face very strong competition from outside Europe. These investments, therefore, prove all the more necessary for competitiveness and the proper functioning of the infrastructure.
 - e. Article 56b §5:** With regard to aid for ports, to extend to all peripheral regions, as defined in the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER), the 10 percentage point increase for eligible costs for assisted areas and to increase this limit if the conditions of Article 107.3.a. are met.



Migration

27. Within the unprecedented migration crisis that Europe is facing, island regions –among others- have been confronted with humanitarian emergencies and refugees’ integration challenges. In this context, a CPMR Policy Position was adopted in November 2015 calling for a global integrated approach to migration, which among other things, would involve addressing the root causes of the phenomenon, enhanced cooperation with third countries, more support to Mediterranean regions, re-examination of the EU migration policy, revision of the Dublin Regulation and improvement of legal migration channels, and last but not least a stronger participation of regions in the crisis management.

The Island Regional authorities:

- 28.** Consider that the migration crisis is far from over and great integration challenges lay ahead.
- 29.** Welcome the resolution of 12 April 2016 of the European Parliament on the situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration, in which issues such as the relocation of refugees among Member States, humanitarian visas, revision of the Dublin regulation, integration including provisions for family unity and children, cooperation with third countries, and additional funding are put forward. They particularly welcome the recognition that regional authorities have a key role in the integration processes of refugees.
- 30.** Welcome the initiative by the European Commission to propose an enhancement of the legal routes of migrants to Europe and to reform the common European asylum system. The Dublin Regulation had been superseded by the intensity of the migrant influx and some of its provisions have de facto not been applied since 2011. It is therefore high time it changed to a fairer allocation system for asylum applications.
- 31.** Recalling the contradictory EU-Turkey deal, which may have considerably reduced the influx of migrants from Turkey to the Greek islands, yet has not been the European solution one would have hoped for, they pinpoint that closing down one route for refugees to Europe redirects people to other routes. For instance, smugglers already offer trips from Greece to Puglia through Albania and across the Adriatic Sea, while the number of migrants that intend to cross the Mediterranean towards Italian islands has sharply increased.
- 32.** Recall that while the mechanism for the relocation of 160 000 refugees from Greece and Italy to other Member States is severely underperforming (as of 12 April 2016 only 1 145 refugees had been relocated), regions have signed bilateral agreements to facilitate the implementation of this agreement. For instance, the Greek regions of South Aegean and North Aegean have signed agreements with the region of Valencia in Spain, which undertakes not only the relocation, but also the healthcare and education of a few thousand refugees.

In light of this, they:

- 33.** Urge the EU institutions to strengthen the European dimension of their response to the global migratory pressures as well as their effort, together with their allies, to address the root causes of the refugee crisis.
- 34.** Urge the EU institutions to think out of the box and involve all relevant actors in effectively addressing the crisis. In particular, Regional Authorities can intervene faster and more accurately to address the problems that refugees are facing and can effectively coordinate relevant programmes and actions in their territories. In this respect, they should be provided with the necessary means through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) or any other relevant EU Fund. Their involvement in the management of the relevant funds will be a crucial step in that direction.
- 35.** Urge the European Commission and the Member States to pay more attention to and make the most out of the positive experiences and best practices implemented by regional authorities over the years and take full advantage of the proposals that regions put forward. The wealth of actions and policies developed at regional level may provide the most needed answers to the current crisis and deliver unique solutions on the ground.



Accessibility

36. Article 170 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on Trans-European Networks stresses that the action by the Community shall take account in particular of the need to link –among others- island regions with the central regions of the Community. In particular, the general priorities of the TEN-T guidelines include the enhanced accessibility and connectivity for all regions of the Union while taking into consideration the specific case of islands, landlocked areas and sparsely populated, remote and outermost regions. Yet accessibility challenges of island regions, which complex in nature as they touch upon a range of EU and national policies, are not properly addressed.

The Island Regional Authorities:

- 37.** See the forthcoming mid-term review of the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework as an opportunity to restore the budget of the Connecting Europe Facility that has been reduced for the mobilisation of funds for the Juncker Plan.
- 38.** See considerable opportunities for growth through better passenger and freight connectivity and are confident that the detailed implementation plan of the “Motorways of the Sea” due in June 2016 will contribute to this objective.
- 39.** Will actively participate in the discussion phase on the Motorways of the Sea implementation plan over the coming year, and commit themselves to contributing with concrete and innovative proposals on how to better valorise current EU instruments and improve their contribution to the accessibility of islands and outermost Regions.
- 40.** Is particularly concerned that the Motorways of the Sea concept does not duly consider the asset that the location of the Outermost Regions represents for the EU nor does it introduce a certain degree of flexibility for projects to be developed in these regions. This flexibility should entail, namely, the eligibility of projects connecting ports from an Outermost Region to its own Member State or projects connecting ports between Outermost Regions.

In light of this, they call on the European Institutions:

- 41.** To restore the budget for the Connecting Europe Facility to the level originally agreed for the current MFF, whilst ensuring the involvement of the island and outermost regions in the priority projects of the TEN-T core network.
- 42.** To consider a modulation of aid intensities within the Connecting Europe Facility, in order to take account of specific regional situations, such as remoteness, insularity scattered archipelagos and outermost regions.
- 43.** To reinforce the principle of the Motorways of the Sea and strengthen incentives for maritime transport in general, fully making use of Article 32 of the TEN-T on the support for maritime transport services and correcting the discrepancy that no maritime projects have been selected under the first CEF call for proposals in 2014 with reference to this Article.
- 44.** To consider the opportunities that island and outermost regions provide for an infrastructure network of alternative fuels within international maritime routes and also enable access of smaller projects to financial instruments designed for the “greening” of maritime transport.
- 45.** To foster the external dimension of European maritime transport, as laid down in Article 8 of the TEN-T regulation, by providing support to start-up maritime routes with third-country ports.



Sustainable energy and climate change

The Island Regional authorities consider that:

- 46.** Islands are particularly vulnerable to climate change and have made so far considerable efforts to contribute to the EU climate goals by massively signing up to the “Pact of Islands” initiative and delivering on their commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- 47.** The EU together with island authorities around the world have played a key role and have substantially contributed to the level of ambition reflected in the global climate agreement signed in COP21.
- 48.** Islands’ potential to develop and demonstrate excellence and innovative solutions in a series of economic sectors, such as buildings, tourism, transport, energy production and management, waste and water management, with a link to the circular economy, agriculture, fisheries etc., is a great step towards a smarter sustainable economy that will boost innovation, competitiveness, jobs and growth.

In light of this, they call on the European institutions to:

- 49.** Recognise in practice the potential of islands to contribute to the EU climate goals and duly support the island authorities that have committed to climate mitigation plans under the “Pact of Islands” initiative.
- 50.** Recognise the cooperation potential on climate action between island authorities within and beyond the EU, for instance through know-how transfer within emerging initiatives such as the Global Covenant of Mayors, for reinforcing the external dimension of EU climate change policy and EU leadership in climate change action.
- 51.** Within the Energy Union framework, recognise the constraints that insularity and remoteness introduce in terms of additional costs with regard to energy efficiency in relation to fuel poverty, renewable energy, electricity networks and interconnections, and ensure that particular attention is paid to island territories and outermost regions so that the latter are not unfairly disadvantaged.
- 52.** Extend and expand existing technical assistance and capacity building programmes and/or platforms that can assist local and regional authorities to develop sustainable energy investments and/or share experiences with each other.

Declaration unanimously adopted

