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WORKING DOCUMENT

on EU Cohesion Policy Strategy for the Atlantic Area

Committee on Regional Development

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United in diversity

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Political background

In its conclusions of 14 June 2010, the Council called on the Commission to define a **European Strategy for the Atlantic area**. The Commission held a public consultation and subsequently published a **Communication** on the Strategy for the Atlantic on 21 November 2011.

On 9 March 2011 Parliament adopted, by a very large majority, a resolution **calling for an integrated strategy** to support the aim of territorial cohesion in the Atlantic regions. In particular, the resolution expressed the need '*for this strategy to be well-connected to EU regional policy and integrated maritime policy and [...] facilitate synergies with other EU policies such as trans-European transport networks, the common fisheries policy, climate and environment actions, the research and development framework programme, the energy policy, etc.*'

I intend to formulate proposals based on this resolution and taking into account the Commission's communication, and shall consult the main partners involved (Member States, regional and local public authorities, civil society organisations and the private sector).

The need for a European political strategy for the Atlantic area

The specific features of the Atlantic area

The Atlantic area has a number of defining characteristics:

- It is a **dynamic area**, thanks to maritime transport, the shipbuilding industry, marine energy, tourism and fishing. We need to make better use of these assets.
- It is an area whose **fragile environment** needs preserving. Pollution of the maritime environment is a serious problem which must be addressed.
- It is an **outlying area** within the European Union, which raises issues of how to open it up and connect it with the rest of Europe.

These problems involve the whole of the Atlantic seaboard and transcend national boundaries. We need to find **political answers at European level**.

An ambitious spatial planning policy for the Atlantic region

Territorial policies are all too often compartmentalised and split amongst different instruments and levels of action. They need to be better coordinated.

A territory is a space which is essentially a living entity fashioned by human activity. **Spatial planning in accordance with natural and geographical features and conditions is the key to economic, social and environmental competitiveness.**

The Strategy for the Atlantic will be drawn up along the same lines as the Strategy for the

Baltic, with a **macro-regional focus**. It will need to facilitate synergies between the various policies concerned at different decision-making levels (European, national, regional and local), on the basis of a cross-cutting approach.

The macro-regional approach is particularly well-suited to the Atlantic area, as:

- it makes it possible for work to be carried out at an **appropriate geographical level**, defining priorities for action which are tailored to the needs of the territories involved; and
- it encourages a **flexible territorial and maritime planning strategy**, involving as many public and private players as possible.

Boosting the dynamism of the Atlantic regions, between land and sea

The Atlantic regions share a common identity: they are a **link between land and sea**. We need to develop specific projects to make the most of this identity.

I shall propose that the Atlantic Strategy should be founded on two pillars: a maritime pillar and a territorial pillar. A structure of this kind should promote synergies among the main sectoral policies involved in the economic, social, environmental and territorial development of the Atlantic regions. This means steering these policies and their financial resources towards clearly identified Atlantic priorities.

Priorities of the Strategy

First pillar: a dynamic and sustainable maritime space

The maritime pillar of the Strategy will essentially be based on the EU's **integrated maritime policy**, the objectives and instruments of which will be revitalised after 2013 through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

The Atlantic Strategy should promote the **sustainable exploitation of the seas and oceans**, while encouraging the **growth of the maritime economy and the coastal regions**.

I shall emphasise the following as the main **vectors for developing the Atlantic maritime area**:

- maritime transport and port activity
- the shipbuilding industry
- marine energies, such as offshore wind energy and energy from waves and tidal currents
- coastal tourism, boating and sailing
- fishing and marine aquaculture

Vigorous action will also be required to **safeguard the ecological balance of the Atlantic**.

Priority must be given to promoting marine research, limiting pollution from vessels, protecting marine species and maintaining water quality.

The Strategy should also attempt to **improve risk prevention and risk management capacities** in the Atlantic, particularly in connection with accidents, natural disasters and criminal activity. Coordination between partners on maritime safety and surveillance and civil protection issues needs to be maximised.

Second pillar: action to open up coastal areas

The first maritime pillar needs to be completed and strengthened by a territorial pillar. The Atlantic **coastal regions need to be opened up** and the circulation of people, goods and services increased, with a view to meeting the objectives of the internal market and cohesion policy.

Historically, where integration of the Atlantic regions has occurred, it has been based on North-South connections. I would stress the importance of **further developing the shipping routes** along the whole of the European Atlantic coast. The 'motorways of the sea', developed as part of the trans-European transport networks, are perfectly suited to this approach. Apart from their role in providing access to these areas, these shipping routes stimulate port-based economic activity, encourage tourism and help reduce CO₂ emissions.

Alongside this North-South integration of the Atlantic seaboard, it is equally important to work on a West-East axis. I shall therefore propose that **investment be focused on West-East transport infrastructure** to improve the connections between the Atlantic territories and the rest of Europe. **Special attention should be paid to ports**, as entry/exit points to and from Europe. Their ability to compete hinges on the existence of reliable connections with their hinterland. Improved access to the Atlantic territories also calls for the **multi-modal interconnection of transport networks**. Consequently, high-speed train lines should be given pride of place when planning West-East transport networks. I shall assess the Commission's proposals concerning the future of the trans-European transport networks, as well as the Connecting Europe Facility's potential as a means of opening up the Atlantic seaboard.

Regional policy as a cross-cutting instrument for spatial planning

Regional policy is the EU's main spatial planning instrument. Its cross-cutting dimension, territorial nature and considerable financial resources make it the cornerstone of the Strategy for the Atlantic. Regional operational programmes for the 2014-2020 period will thus have a key role to play in guiding investment. They will also make it possible to directly link the various public and private partners with the implementation of the Strategy's objectives.

In the context of discussions on the future of regional policy for the 2014-2020 period, I shall be looking at ways in which the **Common Strategic Framework** and the various funds covered by it can most effectively and appropriately be used to support the objective of territorial cohesion in the Atlantic regions.

Implementation of the Strategy

An Action Plan 2014-2020.

The Strategy will bring together the various partners involved, in particular, the Member States, regional and local public authorities and organisations from civil society and the private sector, and will enable each of them to contribute in a flexible manner to achieving predefined common goals.

It will be implemented from 2014 on, in coordination with the next multiannual financial framework, **in the form of an action plan jointly drawn up with all the players concerned and identifying a small number of relevant goals and projects** on the basis of the priorities listed above.

The Strategy will apply to all European regions on the European Atlantic seaboard, including the outermost regions. It will also include an ambitious sub-heading on international cooperation. Projects should be tailored to the needs of their beneficiaries.

The Member States will play a leading role in implementing the Strategy, by directing their public policies towards the priorities identified by the action plan. Their political good will will be crucial to the success of the Strategy.

The regions should also be fully involved. I shall propose that the Atlantic regions' operational **programmes implemented in the Atlantic regions should be closely geared to** the priorities contained in the action plan and coordinated with the goals defined by the Common Strategic Framework.

The **transnational aspect of the European territorial cooperation objective** could be used to provide technical support for implementation of the action plan, particularly by strengthening the regions' institutional capacities and encouraging the exchange of best practices.

Coordination of resources and aims

The Atlantic Strategy should allow **effective coordination of means and objectives**, with strong links to the Europe 2020 Strategy and European policies for the post-2013 period.

The aim is to make better use of existing European funding mechanisms, with the same budget. The Strategy will thus continue to observe the usual rule for macro-regional strategies: **no new funding, no new institutions, no new legislation.** Instead, existing policies need to be more clearly directed towards the priorities of the Strategy's action plan.

Next steps

The first step will be for the European institutions to present the broad outlines of the Strategy. The Commission published its communication on 21 November 2011. I shall present specific proposals during the first half of 2012.

The action plan for the Strategy will be drawn up during 2012 and 2013. With this aim, I am working with the Commission to set up an Atlantic Forum in 2012, to bring all the players involved into the process of deciding the priorities for the action plan.

The Atlantic Forum will be funded by the preparatory action entered on behalf of the Committee on Regional Development in the Union budget for 2012 and 2013. I shall take care to ensure that the different partners are fairly and transparently represented and that Parliament plays a leading role in the work of the forum.