EU cohesion policy strategy for the Atlantic area

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The Committee on Regional Development adopted the initiative report by Alain CADEC (EPP, FR) on the EU Cohesion Policy Strategy for the Atlantic Area.

Members recall that the Atlantic Area is composed of a rather disparate collection of regions, many of which have still not reached the EU's average income level and thus remain under the convergence objective for the purposes of European cohesion policy. They consider that a **macroregional strategy** is essential in order to revitalise the Atlantic area.

A spatial planning policy for the Atlantic: Members are in favour of a **broad strategic approach** incorporating the territorial dimension, developing linkages between land and sea, and establishing a framework to better manage maritime and terrestrial planning policy in the Atlantic regions. The report calls for the **creation of a permanent maritime spatial planning structure** for the Atlantic area, comprising the regions and Member States concerned and the Commission, for the purposes of coordinating the strategy laid down from an intersectoral and transnational perspective.

They consider that the territorial dimension of the strategy is essential for purposes of making the Atlantic regions more accessible, and that it should focus on linking the Atlantic area with the European mainland, connecting the transport, energy and information networks, developing the rural and urban parts of the hinterland, and improving the land-sea links, including the outermost and island regions. They consider it essential to improve the connections between the Atlantic regions and the rest of Europe through **investment in multimodal transport infrastructures**.

The report calls for **local, regional and crossborder partnerships** to be set up with the aim of improving risk prevention and risk management capacities in the Atlantic in connection with maritime and land-based accidents, natural disasters and criminal activities. It believes that the **motorways of the sea** help to provide access to the Atlantic regions, increase trade, stimulate port-based economic activity, encourage tourism and reduce CO_2 emissions. It considers that vigorous action is needed to **safeguard the ecological balance and biodiversity** of the Atlantic and reduce the carbon footprint in that area.

An industrial policy for the Atlantic: the committee hopes that the strategy will support the **competitiveness of the dynamic economic sectors** in the Atlantic regions, through an appropriate industrial policy. It believes, in this regard, that private-sector investment should be supported by the public authorities in the areas of research and development, innovation, cluster development and SME support. It notes that the Atlantic area is particularly suitable for the **promotion of renewable marine energies**, and considers that public support is necessary to accompany private investment in the technologies concerned, especially offshore wind energy and wave and tidal energy.

Members emphasise the economic importance of the maritime industries in the Atlantic regions, especially the **shipbuilding industry**, which is experiencing an extremely difficult situation in some Atlantic of those regions, and for which the Commission needs to facilitate solutions. They underline the strategic importance of maritime transport along the Atlantic seaboard and on the importance of promoting socially, economically and environmentally sustainable forms of tourism in the Atlantic region.

An action plan for 2014-2020: Members call on the Commission to establish the **Atlantic macroregion** and propose an action plan to implement the strategy in the period 2014-2020. They call for the action plan to be linked to the EU's regional policy, the Integrated Maritime Policy, research and innovation policy (Horizon 2020), and the Connecting Europe Facility.

They stress that the action plan should use existing European funding, rather than creating any new budgetary instruments. They point to the important role which the **European Investment Bank, project bonds and public-private partnerships** could play in providing funding for the investment required under the strategy.

Based on a strategic vision for the Atlantic Area that would be jointly agreed, this action plan would then:

- establish key priorities, measures and identify flagship projects;
- set out clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all policy and implementation stakeholders;
- set out key targets and a range of indicators to measure delivery;
- agree a process of evaluation and a mid-term review of achievements; and
- identify the necessary resources to implement the Action Plan.

Members propose that the Action Plan be adopted by the **Atlantic Forum** (of which the European Parliament is the initiator), and calls on the forthcoming Irish presidency to prioritise European Council endorsement of the Action Plan during its term of office.