A new approach to the Atlantic maritime strategy

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The European Parliament adopted by 664 votes to 8, with 21 abstentions, a resolution on a new approach to the Atlantic maritime strategy.

Members welcomed the first Atlantic Strategy and the work done by all institutional and non-institutional actors at different levels since 2013. However, they regretted that the overall results were far from the potential of the action plan and deplored the lack of budgetary allocation for the action plan and the complexity of its governance system.

Noting with concern the effects of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic on the Atlantic maritime and coastal areas, Members believe that the economic, social and territorial cohesion of these territories could be compromised, with a major risk of accelerating depopulation trends.

Remarks and recommendations on the new Atlantic 2.0 action plan

While welcoming the revision of the action plan, Parliament called for the implementation of concrete actions stemming directly from the strategy, while regretting that no funding had been earmarked in the EU budget for the action plan. It recommended that **funding opportunities under the 2021-2027 multi-annual financial framework**, such as Interreg, the European Regional Development Fund, the Connecting Europe Facility and Horizon Europe, should promote calls for projects to deal with the multidimensional challenges and opportunities of the Atlantic regions.

The resolution stressed the importance of **increasing synergies between the different European funds, strategies and programmes** and emphasised that the strategy could encourage joint planning and development of blue economy sectors in the Atlantic region, following best practice in collaborative maritime spatial planning and focusing on environmental, biodiversity and climate concerns.

In particular, Parliament recommended:

- strengthening the integration of the **outermost regions** (ORs) in the new strategy as these regions are highly dependent on the blue economy for their socio-economic sustainability and are home to a significant part of the EU's biodiversity;

- developing an **Atlantic-wide industrial strategy** with a strong environmental and socio-economic sustainability component of the blue economy;

- including the key sectors of **sustainable fisheries and aquaculture** in the new strategy;

- developing **sustainable, intelligent and quality tourism**, as a key sector of the blue economy.

Pillar I - Ports as gateways and hubs for the blue economy

Parliament emphasised the importance of enhancing the role of Atlantic ports and the need to invest in smart infrastructure, as well as the importance of developing ports, including green ports, and managing them in a sustainable way. It suggested:

- including more measures to promote connectivity between ports and airports in the new action plan, where appropriate, enhancing their sustainability;

- completing the priority projects included in the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) for the Atlantic corridor, especially in cross-border areas;

- promoting and investing in the full development of the TEN-T motorways of the sea connecting islands to the mainland;

- developing strategies to remove rail bottlenecks, develop high-speed rail links and upgrading conventional lines.

Pillar II - Blue skills of the future and ocean literacy

The resolution stressed that specific education and training on the blue economy, including through the European Social Fund Plus, would contribute to raising awareness of marine ecosystems and of the need to protect them by tackling the problem of marine litter. It suggested the importance of launching pilot projects in the Atlantic region in the field of ocean governance and knowledge, in the ORs and elsewhere, with the involvement of universities, research centres and maritime colleges.

Pillar III - Marine renewable energy

Regretting that marine renewable energy remains underdeveloped in the Atlantic region, Parliament stressed that a revamped blue economy in the Atlantic area could contribute to the clean energy transition by harnessing the growing potential of offshore renewable energies and the sustainable management of maritime space in line with the European Green Deal.

Pillar IV - Healthy ocean and resilient coasts

Members regretted that the action plan does not mention the implementation of the ecosystem-based approach to marine management required by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. They called on the Commission and the Atlantic regions to:

- promote a major joint project to clean up the Atlantic Ocean and its seabed;

- support the construction of collection and treatment centres for marine, plastic and other waste;

- strengthen risk prevention and management capacities in the event of maritime and land-based accidents and natural disasters;

- develop, in cooperation with the International Maritime Organisation, ambitious initiatives and a roadmap for the decarbonisation of ships based on an impact assessment.

Governance

Parliament called on the Commission to **revise the current strategy** in view of the serious shortcomings identified. It asked that representatives of all the regions concerned be included in national delegations and for Atlantic OCTs and Atlantic non-EU countries to be invited to participate in the strategy. It proposed yearly at least or more frequent meetings between the Member States, the regions involved in the strategy, the Commission, Parliament and all stakeholders in order to promote better coordination and frequent monitoring of the measures put in place by each region.

Lastly, the Commission is invited to carry out an in-depth analysis of the benefits of implementing an **Atlantic macro-region**, which would address the common challenges faced by these regions.