



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

**NAT-VII/012**

**143rd plenary session, 17-19 March 2021**

## **OPINION**

### **A new approach to the Atlantic maritime strategy – Atlantic action plan 2.0**

### **An updated action plan for a sustainable, resilient and competitive blue economy in the European Union Atlantic area**

#### THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- considers that taking into account the Council conclusions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies, it is time to create and develop a macro-regional strategy for the Atlantic area, with a specific budgetary and implementation framework geared to its current situation and potential;
- supports the development of the "Atlantic rail motorway" and of rail port connections, and calls for those Atlantic ports which are strategically important to structure the European transport network but which are currently outside the TEN-T core network to be included in it;
- the maritime nature of the macro-region should be complemented by innovation potential derived from the areas of smart specialisation common to the Atlantic regions: renewable marine energy is a sector where the Atlantic regions have huge potential and practical experience;
- considers that a specific economic and budgetary instrument should be developed for the Atlantic strategy, to facilitate its implementation and the roll-out of its linked actions in a more attractive way. Stresses the possibility of greater impact if there is a specific call for support for cross-border projects within a dedicated budgetary framework for the Atlantic maritime strategy. In view of the increase in the number of financial instruments available, invites the European Commission to organise, potentially together with the European Committee of the Regions, information campaigns for local and regional authorities on best practices for accessing and deploying those financial instruments;
- suggests combining pillars 1 and 2 to form a single pillar entitled "Blue economy activities as drivers for sustainable development of coastal areas", and developing five goals within that pillar: Ports as catalysts for the regional blue economy ecosystem; Ports as innovation hubs for incorporating technological solutions; Improving activities in mature sectors (fisheries, transport and maritime logistics, etc.) and bringing them into line with the Sustainable Development Goals; promoting activities in emerging blue growth sectors and, in particular, renewable marine energies; and Digitalisation of blue economy activities.

Rapporteur:

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**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – A new approach to the Atlantic maritime strategy – Atlantic action plan 2.0**  
**An updated action plan for a sustainable, resilient and competitive blue economy in the European Union Atlantic area**

**I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

The pillars and goals of the Atlantic Action Plan

1. points out that the Atlantic regions are facing a twofold economic crisis. The – as yet unquantified – consequences of Brexit for fisheries, tourism, trade and transport will come on top of those generated by COVID-19. The drastic reduction in mobility we are suffering is having a particular impact on infrastructure, maritime links, logistics chains and the tourism industry;
2. calls, therefore, for mitigation measures to be specifically developed in Atlantic coastal and maritime regions and for account to be taken of the outcome of the Brexit negotiations and its possible impact on the future of the Atlantic maritime strategy and related action plan. In this regard, it is concerned about the possible consequences of the withdrawal of the United Kingdom for the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP);
3. highlights the role of the Atlantic itself in climate change mitigation and management, and the need to better observe, research and understand the way the ocean ecosystem functions and to work together on research;
4. points out that the goals and actions of the four pillars are cross-cutting in nature and that their achievement will depend on good cooperation between the various Commission departments, national supervisory authorities and project coordinators. Warns, however, that, although appropriate, the current pillars must be redefined as the review of European sectoral policies has shown them to be inadequate, and that a proper exercise coordinating them with the Atlantic strategy is necessary;
5. regrets that key blue economy activities are excluded from the Atlantic Action Plan (AAP), such as the naval and maritime construction and transport industries, recreational boating, along with its services and ancillary industry, and sustainable tourism activities relating to the marine environment, including water sports, cruise tourism and ferries, and that neither fisheries, shellfishing or aquaculture are dealt with as subjects in their own right in the AAP;
6. calls, therefore, for marine food supply to be included as a pillar in the AAP as it is a priority of the European Green Deal. In addition, the development of marine ecosystems and their potential for increased carbon storage should also be included;
7. considers, with regard to pillars I and III, concerning possible sectors of activity in the blue economy (ports and renewable energies), that making only these sectors pillars of the AAP

limits its reach in that other existing and emerging areas of action, which are of particular relevance in the Atlantic regions, are not included;

8. suggests, therefore, combining these two pillars to form a single pillar entitled "Blue economy activities as drivers for sustainable development of coastal areas", and developing five goals within that pillar: Ports as catalysts for the regional blue economy ecosystem; Ports as innovation hubs for incorporating technological solutions; Improving activities in mature sectors (fisheries, transport and maritime logistics, etc.) and bringing them into line with the Sustainable Development Goals; Promoting activities in emerging blue growth sectors and, in particular, renewable marine energies; and Digitalisation of blue economy activities;
9. points out that port and port catchment area connectivity is another key topic and welcomes the inclusion in the AAP of a pillar dedicated to Atlantic ports. It is essential to remove bottlenecks in rail transport and on connecting roads (the last mile), whether caused by capacity problems or by redistribution of freight. It is right to include a reference to ports as gateways for trade in the Atlantic and catalysts for business, but their crucial role generating wealth and employment in their catchment areas is overlooked;
10. advocates broadening the scope of Motorways of the Sea in the Atlantic, allowing new connections to be established between ports in the TEN-T global network, and basing the criteria for including European ports in general and Atlantic ports in particular in TEN-T on their strategic importance for the EU and its territories. Stresses, in this regard, the strategic value of Motorways of the Sea in connecting Ireland with mainland Europe after Brexit;
11. calls for those Atlantic ports which are strategically important to structure the European transport network but which are currently outside the TEN-T core network to be included in it. Also calls for funding to be provided for measures for developing Motorways of the Sea and for short sea shipping services to be improved as sustainable, inclusive transport services in the area. These investments should be made in both ports and land connections, including both in "last-mile" connecting roads and, in particular, in modernising and upgrading railway lines, which are essential for creating a sustainable transport network and for the cohesion of outlying regions;
12. supports the development of the "Atlantic rail motorway" and of rail port connections, and key "last-mile" connecting roads, both between existing infrastructure and between TEN-T corridors and other routes in the Atlantic area;
13. welcomes the fact that one of the pillars of the new AAP relates to renewable marine energy, a sector where the Atlantic regions have huge potential and practical experience. However, regrets that, since developing the various forms of marine renewable energy is a priority for the Atlantic regions, key investment for their development has been halted because of the current crisis;
14. considers that the Atlantic strategy should promote marine renewable energy projects in the broad sense, including the promotion of a competitive value chain and the demonstration and validation of new, emerging technologies that can be used to plan and coordinate future generating systems;

15. proposes that, since there are a number of studies on the use of waves, currents and wind in the Atlantic area, they should be incorporated into a map of potential resources, and that, within Pillar III, account should be taken of the compatibility of the activity of producing renewable energy from marine sources or areas with pre-existing activities such as fishing, shellfishing and aquaculture; consideration should also be given to marine ecosystems and biodiversity;
16. criticises the fact that none of the pillars are dedicated to tourism and cultural heritage, which are the hallmark of the European Atlantic area because of the way they contribute to the continent of Europe's brand;

#### Skills for promoting blue growth at European Union level and funding programmes

17. considers that a specific economic and budgetary instrument should be developed for the Atlantic strategy, to facilitate its implementation and the roll-out of its linked actions in a more attractive way. The integration of the goals of the AAP and the Atlantic strategy into the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is particularly relevant with regard to the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union;
18. reiterates that, through the ERDF and the ESF, cohesion policy has been the most important investment tool in the EU in the last programming period. Fully exploiting cohesion policy, along with available EMFAF and EAFRD funding opportunities, will be essential for the future success of Atlantic strategy projects. Streamlining the ESI Funds will help make more funding available for local projects;
19. points out that the AAP's schedule is intended to inspire the supervisory authorities of the Member States and coastal regions when drafting the partnership agreements and programmes for the period 2021-2027, and that many of the actions included in programmes related to the AAP will contribute to the achievement of the EU's climate objectives. Therefore, notes the already existing delays due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and underlines the need for the European Structural and Investment Funds and the national operational programmes to be available and operational at the start of the 2021-2027 programming period;
20. points out that the implementation of the AAP will largely depend on investments made with public and private funding. In addition, flagship projects deriving from the Atlantic strategy should be better suited to EU programmes;
21. in view of the increase in the number of financial instruments available, invites the European Commission to organise, potentially together with the European Committee of the Regions, information campaigns for local and regional authorities on best practices for accessing and deploying those financial instruments;

### The blue economy and the importance of data for developing blue economy methodology at local and regional level

22. notes that the regional and local impact of the blue economy have not yet been fully measured, as a set of indicators based on reliable data measuring the precise effect of activities directly or indirectly relying on the sea has yet to be developed;
23. notes that, in the field of the blue economy, in addition to the activities mentioned above, there is extensive experience available in areas such as shipbuilding and shipping, generating structures for marine energy production and developing biocomponents from marine natural elements;
24. recommends that regional specialisation strategies be adopted for the development of local and regional blue economy methodology, given the considerable number and complexity of existing resources, to help identify the most appropriate measures;
25. proposes that the European Committee of the Regions compile an inventory of blue economy activities in each of its regions and areas, thus creating a real map of the development of the blue economy in the European Union. This should be regularly updated, under the umbrella of the NAT commission, by the specific stakeholders in each region, in order to identify good practice in this area;

### Multilevel governance in the Atlantic

26. supports the new governance structure and monitoring framework and proposes that specific roadmaps or milestones be included for each goal in order to make the actions defined more specific;
27. considers it appropriate to recognise the importance of the LEADER approach to the development of the Atlantic strategy, and the support provided by applying it, through community-led local development strategies associated with Fisheries Local Action Groups, a specific instrument linked to the coast and its economic and social stakeholders, where experience and knowledge are available;
28. strongly advocates effective multi-level governance, while respecting the institutional framework of each Member State, and believes that the renewed maritime strategy should enable the regions to play an active part in Atlantic governance;
29. stresses the need to align the agendas and objectives of the multiple EU processes and policies, as often what is no longer a priority on an agenda ending on a given date becomes a priority on the agenda of another process with a different end date. This governance problem reflects the existence of a fragmented structure and the lack of proper coordination and correct, up-to-date information;

## Cooperation in the Atlantic

30. notes that the achievement of the - albeit inadequate - goals and actions of the four pillars of the AAP as proposed by the European Commission will have positive effects and benefits for adjacent non-Atlantic regions, and strongly recommends extended cooperation with such regions;
31. calls for cross-border cooperation beyond sea boundaries and within regions to be increased by developing simpler calls for cross-border projects, strengthening Interreg programmes and other budgetary tools;
32. points out that territorial cooperation programmes involving the Atlantic regions have made and will continue to make a smart contribution to achieving the objectives of the new AAP, and stresses the possibility of greater impact if there is a specific call for support for cross-border projects within a dedicated budgetary framework for the Atlantic maritime strategy, with defined objectives appropriate to the plan and with specific measurement indicators that are simple to manage;
33. notes that, if cooperation is to be improved, greater mutual understanding is also needed. It would therefore be very useful to draw up a list of stakeholders, problems and opportunities and distribute it to the operators in each country and/or region, and also to establish lines of action or technology agendas for the various sectors of the blue economy geared to the particular specialisation of each region, promoting mutual cooperation and providing a joint offer, without the need to compete;
34. considers that, in order to achieve and enhance cross-border cooperation, it is necessary to create conditions that foster synergies and encourage work in multidisciplinary and multicultural teams by aligning interests and agendas in scientific priorities and management and governance instruments, promoting fair collaboration between teams of people in the various regions, establishing simple, ongoing funding mechanisms so that actions can be taken forward in timeframes that are realistic, and encouraging broad participation of society in these actions to help ensure they are successful;
35. points out that having a large number of parallel but unrelated programmes creates confusion and is likely to lead to inefficient use of public funds. Harmonisation of public research and innovation funding is needed to maximise the coherence and impact of investments and fully exploit researchers' available time. Calls for regional, national and European measures and support to be combined to give them far greater impact than that achieved by several unrelated programmes, thus contributing effectively to a high-performance European Research Area in the field of the blue economy;
36. considers that cooperation should not be limited to maritime and port matters, but should include sea-land interaction and factor in climate change mitigation and adaptation (circular economy, sustainable mobility, marine ecosystems, etc.);

37. stresses the importance of cooperation based on the Atlantic regions' respective Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) and the development of flagship projects in Atlantic smart maritime specialisation areas;
38. would like to stress that, in the context of post-COVID-19 recovery and in the wake of Brexit, cooperation in the Atlantic area becomes even more necessary because of the way the socioeconomic situation is likely to deteriorate and the impact of that on jobs and blue growth, along with the consequences of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union and the final scope of the Brexit Adjustment Reserve;
39. wishes to look to the future in this respect and view the disruption caused by the pandemic and Brexit as a potential opportunity if our key sectors update their technological capabilities. Therefore welcomes new instruments that can boost new European value chains, based on the priorities of regional Smart Specialisation Strategies;
40. considers that, taking into account the Council conclusions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies, it is time to create and develop a macro-regional strategy for the Atlantic area, with a specific budgetary and implementation framework geared to its current situation and potential;
41. believes that the creation of an Atlantic macro-region is the way to deepen cooperation, tackle both sea and land challenges, improve coordination between regions and Member States and streamline the use of funding;
42. believes that the maritime nature of the macro-region should be complemented by innovation potential derived from the areas of smart specialisation common to the Atlantic regions, and facilitate transatlantic cooperation by enabling the outermost regions, third regions and countries to participate, following the Alpine macro-region's model of multilevel governance whereby the regions are directly and actively involved.

Brussels, 19 March 2021

The President  
of the European Committee of the Regions

Apostolos TZITZIKOSTAS

The Secretary-General  
of the European Committee of the Regions

Petr BLÍŽKOVSKÝ

## II. PROCEDURE

<b>Title</b>	A new approach to the Atlantic maritime strategy – Atlantic action plan 2.0 An updated action plan for a sustainable, resilient and competitive blue economy in the European Union Atlantic area
<b>Reference document</b>	COM(2020) 329
<b>Legal basis</b>	Article 307(4) TFEU
<b>Procedural basis</b>	Outlook opinion (Rule 41(a) RoP)
<b>Date of Commission letter</b>	08.09.2020
<b>Date of Bureau/President's decision</b>	27.08.2020
<b>Commission responsible</b>	Commission for Natural Resources
<b>Rapporteur</b>	Paula Fernández Viaña (ES/Renew)
<b>Analysis</b>	08.10.2020
<b>Discussed in commission</b>	23.11.2020
<b>Date adopted by commission</b>	29.01.2021
<b>Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)</b>	Unanimity
<b>Date adopted in plenary</b>	19.03.2021
<b>Previous Committee opinions</b>	
<b>Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation</b>	