



CPMR **ISLANDS**
COMMISSION

42nd General Assembly of the CPMR Islands Commission
22 February 2023, Palma (Illes Balears, ES)

ISLANDS COMMISSION FINAL DECLARATION

PALMA DECLARATION

“Europa Archipelago: an Agenda
For EU Islands”



PALMA DECLARATION

On behalf of its members, the CPMR Islands Commission, gathering for its 42nd Annual General Assembly on 22 February 2023 in Palma, unanimously adopted the following Final Declaration:

IN A NUTSHELL

Yet not fully recovered from the COVID-19 generated crisis, increasingly threatened by the socio-economic consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the heavy impacts of climate change, the current international context requires special attention to the most vulnerable people and territories. In this sense, reducing disparities to achieve the overall harmonious economic, social and territorial development across the EU, as stated by art. 174 of the TFEU, becomes a top priority today more than ever, with islands at the forefront of this process.

Building on the political positions approved in the past years – in particular last year’s Gotland Declaration – and in synergy with the latest works and initiatives in favour of a better consideration of insularity at EU level¹, this Declaration is drafted on the eve of the upcoming Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union that will open a promising window of opportunity for insular territories.

Once again, the CPMR Islands Commission and its members stand together to urge EU institutions a forward-looking, holistic and place-based approach to the structural geographical specificities and needs of island territories, including archipelagos, peripheral and outermost regions. Indeed, the recommendations presented in this document aim at offering useful insights on tangible actions to be taken by the competent EU Institutions to follow up to the path initiated towards a Pact of Islands and the consequent development of an EU Islands Agenda.

With a view to further advancing in the development of a strategic vision for islands, this Declaration reflects not only on the definition of main priorities – broadly addressed in the Gotland Declaration – but also, more precisely, on the operational implementation of a future EU Islands Agenda, by putting forward some key suggestions and proposals in this respect. Most importantly, it intends to highlight that the above-mentioned Agenda represents a golden opportunity to strengthen the cooperation among all relevant stakeholders dealing with insularity at different levels of governance, with the aim of shaping the most appropriate and comprehensive framework so to provide islands with the necessary supporting provisions, tools and regulation in the years to come.

¹ For example, the [CoR Opinion 2959/2022](#) - Enhancing Cohesion Policy support for regions with geographic and demographic handicaps (Article 174 TFEU) by Rapporteur N. Maupertuis or the Joint Declaration of the Forum of European Island Regions *MedInsulae* (2023)

The CPMR Islands Commission hereby:

- 1. Urges** the EU Institutions to respond to the call for an Islands Pact as suggested in its last year's Final Declaration and the Initiative Report on EU islands and Cohesion Policy approved by the European Parliament in June 2022. In this regard, it **firmly believes** that the 2023 Presidencies of the Council of the European Union – held by Sweden and Spain especially – represent an unprecedented opportunity to gather momentum for the development of a long-term EU Strategy for Islands, ensuring the adequate integration of an insular perspective and related territorial proofing in the EU legislative process and policies of high relevance.
- 2. Points out** that a serious EU commitment to move towards an EU Islands Agenda, based on the example of the Urban Agenda, would be the natural follow-up to the main demands raised by key EU players in relation to the future of islands. To this end, it **is convinced** that a targeted Communication by the European Commission could represent a first crucial milestone in the process of realising this Agenda.
- 3. Emphasizes** that, taking the form of a long-term strategy, an EU Islands Agenda should provide an overarching framework to guide the operational work of the EU Institutions in the next years, focusing on a set of jointly identified priorities for islands. In this sense, it also **proposes** that general indications are established to clearly define the cooperation modalities among involved stakeholders working on the future Agenda.
- 4. Invites** the EU Institutions to take the necessary steps towards the design as well as operational implementation of an EU Islands Agenda, by promoting throughout the whole process fruitful dialogue between all relevant stakeholders – including member states, regional and local authorities and social partners – as appropriate, based on their respective competences and fields of action. In fact, it **underlines** that participatory approach and multi-level governance represent the only way towards an EU Islands Agenda and **insists on** the need of strengthening islands' consultation and cooperation when designing such an Agenda. This is essential in order to ensure better co-ownership and active participation of island actors in the EU policy-making, while being a precondition for the overall success of this initiative in the upcoming years.
- 5. Highlights** that both the preparatory work and implementation of an EU Islands Agenda require proper coordination and interaction among stakeholders covering several policy sectors and coming from different governance levels. It therefore **advises** envisioning and making use of an adapted working structure, consisting of a number of thematic partnerships made of a variety of players that deal with the topics and priorities set by the Agenda. This would help guarantee the best possible management of island issues, by making the most of relevant experiences as well as sharing and capitalising good practices, available knowhow and evidence, including research and analytical work. Eventually, this should help to effectively identify shared challenges, but also define objectives, propose sets of actions and assess results, overall contributing to an improved use of EU regulation and funding targeting island territories, including archipelagos, peripheral and outermost regions.

6. **Thinks** that the future EU Islands Agenda should focus on a preliminary limited set of key economic, social and environmental issues with strong territorial impacts on islands, in coherence with EU objectives. In this respect, it stresses that the very first cross-cutting challenge and priority to be addressed is the lack of sufficient statistical data and impact assessment of EU sectorial policies in island territories, which would facilitate more targeted analysis, help identify their main shortcomings and determine the necessary provisions and actions to overcome them.
7. **Recommends** that, in the above-mentioned Agenda, sustainable development is notably dealt with as the core issue and considered in all its different but interconnected dimensions with place-based approach and tailored solutions. In this sense, in line with the main priorities identified in last year's Final Declaration and recalling its main reflections on emerging issues, the CPMR Islands Commission **considers** the following points as crucial for the future Agenda:

a. Economic sustainability

- Ensuring competitiveness and attractiveness of island territories in the face of the recent global crisis, with the necessary consideration of additional operating costs deriving from insularity and, among others, the demand for greater flexibility in the use of state aid. It is extremely important, indeed, that the European state aid legislation incorporates horizontal provisions for island territories, including archipelagos, peripheral and outermost regions, which require a legal specially designed and broader approach due to their discontinuity with the European mainland (e.g. in regional aids, de minimis, GBER, among others).
- Improving islands' connectivity and mobility, bearing in mind the high dependence of these territories on a limited number of means of transportation - air and maritime transport - for their connectivity needs. The EU legislative devices adopted under the Green Deal strategy imply decarbonisation measures that have significant impacts on transport fees, resulting in extra costs for islands' businesses and citizens. Therefore, transitional and compensatory measures in favour of island regions are needed.
- Supporting the necessary diversification in islands' economies, especially boosting sustainable blue economy as key economic driver in terms of opportunities for both businesses and professionals, but also investing in research, innovation and digitalization and exploiting the full potential of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) and Interregional Innovation Investments (I3).

b. Social and cultural sustainability

- Strengthening good governance, social cohesion, and wellbeing in islands' communities, especially addressing main structural constraints affecting these territories such as demographic challenges, related infrastructure, services and housing needs, as well as the lack of opportunities in terms of jobs and skills development leading to difficulties in attracting and retaining talents.
- Enhancing local communities and economies in islands, while protecting their diverse traditions, unique cultural and linguistic heritage.

c. Environmental sustainability

- Tackling islands' energy security and poverty, in light of their specificities and vulnerabilities, to help them meet the ambitious goals of decarbonisation, appropriately taking into account the structural limitations of these territories as well as their promising role in pioneering the green transition.
- Preserving and restoring islands' rich biodiversity and fragile ecosystems as well as supporting climate change adaptation & mitigation, while supporting a just transition towards climate neutrality.
- Promoting the sustainable management of the limited natural resources in islands, including in particular, land, water and raw materials, as well as nature-based solutions and circular economy, towards more resilient and sustainable models that are gradually less dependent on the mainland and external suppliers.

8. Reiterates that, in the current global context, a common and ambitious vision when it comes to designing island policies at EU scale is of utmost importance not only to support island capacity for transition and structural change, but also to ensure a full exploitation of their potential for the benefit of all islands' communities and, more broadly speaking, all the EU, thus contributing to the achievement of the single market as well as economic, social and territorial cohesion's objectives enshrined in the TFEU.

9. Regrets the reservations and delays encountered in the launch and full realisation of an EU Islands Agenda. It nevertheless **acknowledges** the emerging political ambition for an EU vision for islands and **follows with great interest and hope** the promising progress made in this direction, as witnessed by the efforts of a variety of key EU players dealing with insularity in the last months.

10. Commits to keep on leading this important path for the benefit of all its members – island territories, including archipelagos, peripheral and outermost regions – in synergy with its different partners and indeed **looks forward** to the future months to seeing the EU Islands Agenda to become a reality.

Unanimously approved