ISLANDS AND TERRITORIAL COHESION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RENEWAL OF THE TERRITORIAL AGENDA 2020

I. CONTEXT

As a supplement to the CPMR’s Technical Paper ‘Renewal of the Territorial Agenda: issues at stake for the CPMR’, the Islands Commission offers this ‘island’ perspective on the territorial issues being addressed by the Member States in their review of the Territorial Agenda 2020 (TA2020). Ahead of the adoption of the new version of the TA, expected in autumn 2020 under the German presidency of the EU Council, this paper identifies avenues to be explored concerning the issues relating specifically to islands in the post-2020 Territorial Agenda, with the aim of contributing to the European debate.

The revision of the TA is taking place in a particularly complex context of transition affecting the future of the European Union and its territories. The last ten years have been deeply marked by new and global challenges (climate change, migration, increasing scarcity of primary resources, etc.) as well as by a strong and growing awareness on the part of the general public of the importance of these issues. In Europe, increasing disparities in economic performance between different territories, the rejection of austerity, the scarcity of public resources and the rise in populist and euro-sceptic movements call for responses of a new kind.

II. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR THE ISLANDS COMMISSION TO TAKE PART IN THE DEBATE?

Over the last ten years the Territorial Agenda (TA) has been regarded as the practical application of the principle of territorial cohesion in the EU’s development strategy. However, in spite of the high ambitions of its advocates, the TA has not managed to impose itself as a genuine guiding principle for European territorial development policies. This is reflected notably in the limited extent to which demands to take account of the island dimension have been recognised, whether in the Barca report, the Europe 2020 Strategy, or in the European Commission’s most recent reports on cohesion.

In this context, and advocating the creation of a European Islands Agenda alongside the EU’s existing Urban Agenda, the Islands Commission wishes to engage its members in a discussion on the inclusion of island-specific issues – in line with its positions on the different policy areas that are of priority interest to the EU islands (cohesion, transport, state aid, etc.) – in the review process of the TA2020.
III. HOW SHOULD THE TERRITORIAL AGENDA EVOLVE POST-2020?

The months between now and the German EU presidency in 2020 are crucially important for the mission of the Council’s Task Force in charge of the renewal of the TA2020. The points below provide some avenues to explore that could form the basis for an Islands Commission policy position on the TA post-2020 and help to structure our contribution to the European debate.

Notwithstanding the progress achieved over the last ten years, the review of the TA2020 should:

- **Ensure that the principle of territorial cohesion is introduced as a priority objective in European sectoral policies and that the provisions enshrined in Article 174 of the Treaty are implemented**

This approach, which aims to reduce disparities in development between the different territories across the EU, cannot be envisaged without taking into account the diversity of the EU’s territories, including its island regions.

EU policies must include provisions and measures that can harness the potential of, or if necessary ‘correct’, the different socio-economic conditions that characterise the European islands. People living on an island are not in a position to benefit from the free movement of goods, services or persons under the same market conditions as people living in mainland regions.

- **Better assess the diversity of territorial situations across the EU**

It is true that there are many different types of island situation (islands that are Member States, medium-sized islands, archipelagos, small islands, etc.) and in some cases there is an accumulation of handicaps (sparsely populated islands, mountainous islands, peripheral or outermost islands). However, despite these differences, the islands merit the recognition of the specific characteristic of ‘insularity’.

One of the first things the review of the TA must do, therefore, is to examine the territorial dimension of existing EU policies. Effective and proportional intervention stems from a detailed knowledge and analysis of the extent to which the various issues affect the islands. To do this, it is imperative that the EU is able to:

- make use of available financial means and technological tools to obtain long-term, reliable and comprehensive data series on the islands that are comparable at European level and measured on a scale that is closest to the reality of the island situation (NUTS 3);
- systematically carry out (and/or ask Member States to carry out) territorial impact assessments of EU policies, while ensuring that island regions are the prime beneficiaries of such intervention;
- broaden the list of basic indicators currently used to analyse the performance of European territories in terms of economic growth. In this respect, it is particularly important to develop specific indicators for the islands that assess the extent to which they are impacted by territorial discontinuity and the obstacles they when delivering basic public services (spatial planning, provision of drinking water, waste management, access to training and to hospital treatment, etc.).
In the short term, ensure that the islands benefit from a maximum level of flexibility in the application of the EU regulatory framework

The implementation of a specific initiative aiming to integrate the island dimension into the core of the European strategic approach is likely to be a very long and complex process. It will therefore be necessary in the short term to modify the current legislative framework and/or develop specific measures to benefit the European island territories as a whole. In this respect:

- in the context of the European structural and investment (ESI) funds, the EU should guarantee for all island regions:
  - the maximum level of flexibility in thematic concentration;
  - higher rates of EU co-financing;
  - eligibility of certain airport infrastructure projects for funding;
  - a more advantageous exemption regime in the rules on national regional state aid;
  - strengthened support for island regions (including by means of specific technical assistance measures) so as to better harness the potential of the innovative and integrated approaches being developed at grass roots level (integrated territorial investments (ITI), community-led local development (CLLD), the future strategic objective 5 of the Cohesion Policy);

- in the field of transport, the EU should include a perspective that is adapted to the requirements of territorial discontinuity, while ensuring that the EU’s targets for greenhouse gas reduction can be met.

In the long term, better coordinate the EU’s sectoral policies and promote specific approaches for the islands, combining territorial and maritime development

Since it was launched, the TA2020 has contributed at both technical and political levels to the European debate aiming to recreate the necessary conditions conducive to the development of a European legislative framework to facilitate integrated territorial approaches between the different European sectoral policies.

Over the past ten years, the European Union has achieved significant results, particularly in the area of its integrated maritime policy and blue growth. Given the real existence of this ‘Europe of the Seas,’ the European Union should be in a position to take account of these maritime policies in the review of the TA2020.

This will, of course, mean a significant change in the dynamics of how European sectoral policies are coordinated, placing the island regions at the centre of a new strategic approach to the development of the economic assets that characterise the functional interactions between land and sea.

In this context, the EU will need to play a role in supporting Member States in fully implementing the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive and also in ensuring that the maritime dimension is comprehensively taken into account in the work of the TA post-2020.

Democratise the conception of the new TA

In certain specific economic areas, the islands are today seen as ‘test beds’ for the creation of sustainable employment: circular economy, production of energy from renewable sources, development of ecosystem services and telemedicine, for example.
At a time when the European Union is looking to adopt a new development strategy for the post-2020 period, which could be closely aligned with the United Nations’ sustainable development goals (SDGs)\(^1\), it is worth mentioning that the islands have already included most of these goals in their own strategies and/or policies. The diversity of the EU territories, each of which possesses a unique natural, social or economic capital, is an undeniable advantage in working towards achieving these SDGs at European level.

In this context, and given the other points developed above, the European Union cannot exclude the representatives of the island regions from the conception and the governance of the TA post-2020.

The announced public consultation to be organised by the Council’s Task Force represents a first step towards goals which could not be more ambitious and which must include the active participation of island authorities as well as supervision by and input from the future European Parliament.

### IV. NEXT STEPS

The Islands Commission will closely monitor the review of the TA2020 so as to ensure that the positions of the island regions on these issues are fully taken into account in the European debate at both the political and technical levels. In this respect, the Islands Commission will, in particular:

- work together with the CPMR General Secretariat and with the other CPMR Geographical Commissions on a consolidated position on the future of the TA post-2020 for the autumn of 2019. In this respect, the Islands Commission supports the CPMR’s action in the context of the consultation (questionnaire) organised by the Task Force under the Romanian presidency;

- develop its own policy position (which will need to be put to the vote at the plenary session of the CPMR General Assembly in October 2019) on the future of the Territorial Agenda and the island dimension. This will then be sent, before the end of 2019, to the Croatian presidency, to the new college of Commissioners and to the newly elected MEPs (REGI, TRAN, ENVI Committees, etc.);

- explore with the Commission (DG REGIO) the possibility of taking an active part in the official events which will accompany the review of the TA2020 over the coming months;

- present a detailed report of its activities to its members at its General Assembly in 2020.

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\(^1\) See the European Commission’s Reflection Paper ‘A Sustainable Europe by 2030’, January 2019
The Islands Commission is one of the 6 Geographical Commissions of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR).

It represents about 15 million people in 21 European regional island authorities from 11 countries located in the Mediterranean, North Sea, Baltic Sea and the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans.

It operates both as a think tank and as a lobby group for Island Regions, urging European Institutions and Member States to pay special attention to the islands and to implement policies that are best suited to their insularity.

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