

A Conference that addresses the future of Europe's peripheral maritime regions

The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) aims to create a platform to give Europeans a greater say in the future of Europe and to play a role in setting the priorities of the European Union. "Only together can we build the EU of tomorrow," said Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

Regional and local authorities are ideally placed to promote the importance of a strong, democratic and united Europe and trust that their voice will be fully represented at the CoFoE. It should complement the democratic decision-making institutions which exist at regional, national and European level.

Regional and local authorities are delivering on EU and global agendas, by supporting local solutions adapted to their territorial specificities. They contribute to the development of innovative solutions for instance regarding sustainable and local food systems, sustainable mobility, the development of renewable energy production and ensuring social justice and gender equality. They know what measures, funds and investment are best suited to answer their needs. Despite that, they are not or hardly involved - in particular by the Member States - in the development and implementation of European policy, such as, for example, drawing up Recovery & Resilience Plans; there is also a continuous effort to centralise cohesion policy.

Regions are key to shape the future of Europe, and peripheral maritime regions have a strategic importance at the borders of the European Union and its neighbouring countries. They are essential partners and a great opportunity for the future of Europe.

CPMR Members have significant territorial assets while they face unique challenges. They are, however, diverse and experience different regional realities that demand a place-based approach at European level. For instance, regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as island, cross-border and mountain regions and sparsely populated regions with very low population density have specific constraints that need to be tackled through the development of an exhaustive application of article 174 TFEU. The specific challenges inherent to outermost regions should also be given particular attention, as per article 349 TFEU.

This Final Declaration of the 49th General Assembly of the CPMR builds on long term political messages from the CPMR concerning policy issues of high relevance to its Members. These messages are framed to fit in three of the ten topics addressed by the CoFoE and address the scope of actions within policies or areas covered by the EU, referring to specific articles of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

Considering the important role of regions for the future of Europe, and the strategic importance of peripheral maritime regions at the borders of the European Union and its neighbouring countries, the CPMR calls on the CoFoE to take inspiration from the following policy messages in view of developing its concrete recommendations and proposals.



TOPIC 1. A STRONGER AND RESILIENT ECONOMY, JUSTICE AND JOBS

Regarding EU investment policies, the CPMR:

- 1. Demands** that Cohesion Policy should be included in the list of EU policies to be addressed within Topic 2, being one of the most significant EU investment policies in the current financial framework and by its role in reinforcing the effective cohesion of the European territories. Economic forecasts suggest territorial disparities remain a daunting challenge in the medium and long term, with the risk of being aggravated by trends such as climate change and the impact of digitalisation;
- 2. Believes** that it is crucial to develop an exhaustive application of [article 174 TFEU](#), which is the main legal basis for cohesion policy, in order to best exploit its potential in tackling specific territorial divides and challenges;
- 3. Demands** that the principles of multi-level governance and partnership under cohesion policy are further strengthened through a sounder and forward-looking interpretation, as well as effective gender mainstreaming in cohesion policy programmes and projects;
- 4. Calls** for a discussion on ensuring better consistency across EU policies and initiatives delivering investment in the future, to avoid the current competition and overlaps between the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and Cohesion Policy. The Conference should envision the establishment of a strategic framework underpinning and integrating the investment policies of the EU in the future having regions as the heart of any sustainable and lasting investment.

Regarding the policy framework for EU investment, the CPMR:

- 5. Expects** a reflection on how the goal of promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion enshrined in [article 3 TEU](#) can be mainstreamed across the main EU policies;
- 6. Calls** for strengthening the role of Cohesion Policy within the EU policy framework as a place-based policy delivering EU objectives across all EU regions. The EU should prioritise shared management programmes with the regions to implement its investment policies leaving no one behind;
- 7. Recalls** that respect for the rule of law – together with human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, and respect for human rights – are fundamental values of the EU according to [article 2 TEU](#); is therefore deeply concerned about the continued disregard of rule of law principles in certain Member States and **urges** the EU to apply relevant instruments under the rule of law framework in order to ensure compliance with these principles;
- 8. Calls** on the EU to step up its support to young people ensuring they can enjoy resources and opportunities to enable their participation in democratic life and society, and to obtain good jobs.

Regarding any EU recovery plan follow-up initiative, the CPMR:

- 9. Calls** for any EU recovery plan follow-up initiative to strengthen its support to economic, social and territorial cohesion enlightened in [article 3 TEU](#) with a stronger role of regions and local authorities on the definition of the investment measures. Regional authorities know best the territorial needs, an essential knowledge to ensure that investments are directed to projects that have the greatest impact on the well-being and prosperity of the population. It should not be created at the expense of existing EU policies supporting investment.
- 10. Asks** for a stronger coordination and complementarity between the recovery instrument and other EU programmes. Funds deriving from the Recovery instrument should not replace or overlap with existing EU funds, such as the EU structural and investment funds. There should be a better and more systematic alignment with EU policies, to avoid inconsistencies from one Member State to another.



Regarding the coordination of EU economic policies with a regional relevance, the CPMR:

11. Requests a redesign of the current framework for economic policy coordination, the so-called “European Semester”, so that regional authorities as relevant partners become involved in the structured dialogue at national and European level in line with their competences;

12. Calls for a different interpretation of [Article 119 TFEU](#) regarding the coordination of Member States’ economic policies. A territorial approach needs to be integrated into the European Semester process acknowledging the existing territorial challenges in the EU Member States. Relevant investment guidelines for EU funded programmes issued through the economic framework should integrate a territorial dimension;

13. Questions the validity of the so-called ‘macroeconomic conditionality clause’ which makes Cohesion Policy funding depending on European economic governance rules, in view of the potential review of the Stability and Growth Pact. Such a clause penalises regional authorities even though they have no responsibility over national budgetary planning.

Regarding the future of EU transport policies, the CPMR:

14. Urges the Member States to accelerate the application of [article 170 TFEU](#) and the completion of the TEN-T network;

15. Calls for a stricter interpretation of [article 170.2 TFEU](#) to better answer the connectivity needs of islands and peripheral Regions, as referred to in the article;

16. Believes that while interoperability of the networks and technical standardisation are key to ensuring the smooth functioning of a joint European Network, the EU should remain attentive to regional specific challenges that demand a more tailor-made approach;

17. Demands a better application of [Article 91.2 TFEU](#) to ensure that the cases where the application of EU transport policies might seriously affect the standard of living and level of employment in certain regions are duly considered. In this respect, the CPMR **expects** a systematic sound ex-ante impact assessment including a focus on peripheral maritime regions;

18. Calls for a strengthened ambition at EU level regarding maritime transport to better exploit its contribution to decarbonisation, reduced congestion and improved accessibility;

19. Demands that the entire life cycle of vehicles and its fuels must be considered when assessing climate performance. Global requirements for zero emissions needs to be goal-based and technology-neutral to reach climate neutrality in the transport sector;

20. Recalls the need for EU action to support the transition towards climate-neutral transport in support of the Green Deal and its objectives. The set of measures established by [Article 91 TFEU](#) should, therefore, include measures contributing to pave the way towards climate neutral transport; **calls** in this regard for an exhaustive application of Article 91.2 to better tackle the cases where the measures might affect certain regions, for example the islands and outermost Regions that benefit from a limited range of transport modes to ensure their connection;

21. Underlines that modal shift towards more sustainable transport modes such as short-sea shipping and rail should be encouraged whenever possible.

Regarding the need to climate-proof all investments supported by the EU budget, the CPMR:

22. Believes that the EU should double its efforts to ensure that investments supported by the EU budget favour a just transition to climate neutrality to the most impacted regions by climate change, such as peripheral and maritime regions;



23. Stresses therefore, in regard to [Article 171 TFEU](#), that in addition to ensuring the economic viability of TEN-T transport infrastructure projects, the EU should also ensure that such projects are climate-proof, in line with the EU's long-term objectives and international commitments;

24. Believes that a reflection should be launched to introduce flexibility in the Stability and Growth Pact, so that all EU co-financing relating to green investment projects supported by the EU Structural and Investment Funds should be exempt from the Stability and Growth Pact rules.

TOPIC 2. CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Regarding the importance of climate change, energy transition and climate neutrality, the CPMR:

25. Recalls the need to integrate the ambition of the European Union regarding climate action, the energy transition, and the objective of reaching climate neutrality by 2050 while ensuring a just and fair transition for all regions, taking into account the characteristics of all territories, in any follow-up proposal to the CoFoE process;

26. Stresses that more than 200 million EU citizens live near the coastline, to which must be added the millions of people who travel annually to coastal areas, and that they are increasingly confronted with growing and worsening slow onset and extreme weather events. Thus, the CPMR **calls** for a recognition of the pivotal role of maritime regions both within and outside the EU in the fight and adaptation to climate change and their inherent specificities and vulnerabilities;

27. Calls for regions to be seen as key partners in the ecological transition and be fully involved in policy design and implementation. Regional governments are already acting via their mitigation and adaptation measures, encompassing different policy areas with an integrated and place-based approach, to deliver a climate neutral and resilient future;

28. Stresses that offshore renewable energy is crucial for Europe to reach its 2030 carbon reduction targets and become climate neutral by 2050 and that boosting cooperation between regional, national and European levels is key for its development, planning and deployment;

29. Highlights the importance of recognising the multi-functional and cross-cutting role of forestry in the EU climate ambitions, as a key role to help to realise the Green Deal; **stresses** the importance of a place-based EU forest policy that consider the large regional variations and conditions within different parts of the EU;

30. Recalls that Regions are catalysts for cooperation between the local actors in the territory and between the national and local levels and **calls** upon the EU to support it;

31. Notes that reaching a fair transition to a climate neutral economy differs from one region to another, therefore needing for place-based and region-specific solutions. In this respect, financial and technical support should be provided to those areas that face the biggest challenges in the ecological transition, while at the same time front runners should be guaranteed a conducive environment to develop innovative solutions to the benefit of Europe as a whole.

Regarding the recognition of the crucial role played by oceans and seas, the CPMR:

32. Highlights that the seas and oceans are a key dimension among the new challenges faced by the EU today, such as food security, economic recovery and growth, energy independence and efficiency, the environment and climate change, migration, defence and security;

33. Recalls that the word maritime is absent within the EU treaty and calls for any Treaty change to reflect the strategic importance of the maritime economy and jobs for the European Union. The maritime economy involves all territories, and not just coastal ones;



34. Calls upon the EU to equip itself with ambitious funding programmes and investment tools to support the maritime economy. In this respect, using the European budget must be underpinned by a guiding cross-sectoral strategy to integrate maritime issues into different European programmes;

35. Highlights the strategic role that fisheries (e.g. small-scale commercial coastal fishing) and aquaculture sectors play to ensure food security and growth and jobs and calls upon EU to reinforce the social and economic dimensions of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP);

36. Urges the EU to continue to support existing and create new cooperation frameworks such as sea-basin strategies and macroregional strategies, also as a way to engage with national and regional governments from neighbouring countries. When developed together with regional authorities and provided with adequate financial and operational support, they address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area.

TOPIC 3. MANAGING MIGRATION THROUGH A PREDICTABLE, BALANCED AND RELIABLE SYSTEM

Regarding the role and needs of EU regions, the CPMR:

37. Regrets that despite the ambitions of the TFEU and the European Commission's new Pact on Migration and Asylum to develop a common policy on asylum and migration, the EU has so far failed to provide adequate responses to face global challenges in this field, and that the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility enshrined in [article 80 TFEU](#) seems so far to have gone largely unheeded;

38. Urges, in this respect, the European Commission, Member States and Parliament to demonstrate ambition to overcome past failings and provide a holistic, sustainable, effective and humane response to migration and asylum management compliant with articles [78](#), [79](#) and [80](#) TFEU;

39. Stresses that while migration and asylum correspond to a national competence, it is ultimately at regional and local level that the effects of EU and national policies are felt the most. Regional authorities continue to provide a pragmatic reply to needs on the ground and are facing the realities of migration flows which are particularly complex and challenging in the regions of first entry located on the Union's external borders;

40. Recalls in this regard that Regions, and in particular peripheral and maritime regions, are important stakeholders that need to be given better consideration in the EU Migration and Asylum Management Framework within a multi-level governance and cross-sectoral approach to the delivery of related policies;

41. Urges the EU to show a better understanding of the role of regions in all areas in which they have formal competences or where their action is needed or can provide added value in achieving EU and national objectives, with regard to both the internal and external dimensions of migration policies;

42. Calls on the European Commission to develop better governance, programmes and funding opportunities to help regions and their local authorities, both within the EU and its neighbours, tackle specific challenges they are facing and improve the outcomes of regional action within a long-term vision of structural and capacity-building needs.

Adopted unanimously by the CPMR Political Bureau on behalf of the General Assembly

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