

UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION

28th CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS OF THE OUTERMOST REGIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 8 November 2023

The presidents of the Outermost Regions of the European Union, meeting at their 28th Annual Conference in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, under the presidency of Mr Fernando Clavijo Batlle, President of the Canary Islands, hereby adopt the following

FINAL DECLARATION

The Outermost Regions (OR), like the rest of the European Union (EU), have recently had to evolve in a geopolitical context marked by international degradation, which has further aggravated their vulnerability and dependence on the outside world.

Armed conflicts in the world and instability in our geographical surroundings, especially in Africa and the Caribbean, require specific responses in order to ensure the security and stability of the entire European Union, including its most remote territories.

Moreover, potential enlargements of the European Union in the coming years make our future even more uncertain.

The Union must seek a balance for the future while ensuring its stability and internal cohesion on the basis of the strategic autonomy approach advocated by the European Commission. This approach cannot only be continental, but must also be projected towards our regions, those furthest away from the European continent.

European elections next year will be crucial for the immediate future of the EU, as they will shape a new European Parliament and condition the composition of the new



European Commission, both of which are essential for the promotion of a united Europe and visible outermost regions.

Future of the Cohesion policy

We urge the new institutions to defend the cohesion policy as a fundamental pillar of the European integration process, safeguarding its original identity and objectives and its current multi-level governance approach.

We also hope that the principle of "Do no harm to cohesion" will be projected into all European policies, avoiding initiatives that could have a negative impact on territorial cohesion and even lag some regions behind, a concern that must be clearly shared by our States.

Territories caught in the "development trap", described in the 8th Cohesion Report, are the breeding ground for anti-European sentiments that require specific and immediate responses. This is why we consider it essential to strengthen the adaptation of European policies and their supporting measures in order to improve the attractiveness of our regions while respecting the principle of social justice.

European Budget

The review of the Multiannual Financial Framework offers a unique opportunity to provide the Union with the necessary resources to meet current and future challenges on the basis of a solidarity-based approach taking into account the principle of geographical reality. Any new instrument must therefore ensure the inclusion of the outermost regions in accordance with Article 349 of the TFEU, preventing them from benefitting only the most developed regions.

Furthermore, we urge the European institutions to speed up the adoption procedure of legislative proposals leading to delays in the closure of the 2014-2020 programming period.



Fit for 55

The negotiation process of the *Fit for 55* legislative package is almost completed and the OR, even though they have obtained clearly insufficient and mostly transitory exceptions and derogations, remain extremely concerned about the effects that the relevant implementation will have on their economies, the mobility of their citizens, the provision of supplies at reasonable prices and their convergence with the European Union.

We therefore demand an overall impact assessment on the implementation of this package and an analysis of the cumulative and combined effects of the different measures on the OR.

In the same way that the cost of implementing these objectives for the European automobile industry is beginning to be taken into account, the difficulties to implement these objectives in the outermost regions must also be considered.

We also call for the Commission's delegated acts implementing the *Package* and subsequent reports reviewing the implementation of each measure to include a specific section on the situation of the outermost regions.

Energy

Given their geographical situation and in a context of increasingly ambitious challenges and objectives, the outermost regions must receive greater support for the valorisation of all their natural resources, including biomass and hydrogen, both in terms of production and storage.

Migration



The European Union is a focal point of attraction for our neighbours and will continue to be so if we fail to bridge the development gap. The Union's response to the phenomenon of irregular migration will be ineffective as long as its instruments are not adapted to the reality of this migration phenomenon, as it disregards the regions at the frontline of this humanitarian crisis.

In addition to the adoption of long-term measures, designed with a co-development approach with the countries of origin, and creation of legal, organised and safe migration channels, it is urgent to address those emergency situations we are facing. Once again, we demand a real co-responsibility of the Union and all its Member States, ensuring a dignified care with respect for the human rights of the people who arrive, especially unaccompanied migrant minors.

To this end, in addition to making progress on a specific allocation of the AMIF for the OR facing irregular migration, to be articulated in a more flexible manner on the basis of realistic indicators in view of its unpredictability and emergency, we call for the adoption of specific measures, as the Commission has already acted in response to the situation in Lampedusa.

European Territorial Cooperation

Our geographical location is a strength for the whole of Europe; we therefore call on the European institutions to deepen with immediate effect their reflection on the regional integration of the OR.

We welcome the progress announced by the European Commission during the event on the regional integration of the Outermost Regions organised under the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU and we urge it to adopt a genuine Wider Neighbourhood policy, with tailor-made instruments and own resources.

In this context, we urge the European Commission to define the specific allocation of funds in the next financial framework for the implementation of OR projects through a



specific budget allocation from the external policy funds, with the OR European territorial cooperation programmes.

Taxation and Customs

We stress the strategic importance of our specific tax regimes as economic drivers of our respective regions and request their protection, including the Madeira Free Zone, under the recent international agreements intended to harmonise direct taxation.

This specific reality must also be taken into account as part of the future customs reform, for which we request that specific prior impact studies be carried out.

Transport

We call for the creation of a specific financial operational programme for transport and connectivity in the OR (transport POSEI), outside the structural funds, that could alleviate difficulties arising from remoteness and price increase, in order to ensure the connectivity of our regions at local, national and European level.

Agriculture

We call for inter-institutional collaboration to be encouraged to strengthen the POSEI budget in order to improve our agricultural, agroindustrial and agri-food autonomy. We hope that the ongoing review of the POSEI will confirm this need, which has been evident for years.

Furthermore, in the context of the review of Regulation on the protection of animals during transport and related operations, we reiterate the need to take into account our specific characteristics, especially with regard to the sea transport of live animals.

Fisheries



The common fisheries policy and maritime policy must be adapted to allow the development of the fisheries and sustainable blue economy sectors in the OR, which constitute European hubs in their respective basins.

Although the increase in the *de minimis* aid threshold is a step forward, it is not the solution to the problems of renewing the fishing fleet. We therefore reiterate the need for the Commission to assure this renewal by making the common fisheries policy more flexible and adapting the current methodology required to prove a balance between the fishing capacity and fishing opportunities, since this is difficult to apply in the outermost regions.

With a view to the next programming period, we reiterate our request to include in the FEMPA the possibility of aid for fleet renewal in the OR.

Institutional relations

European Commission

We hope that the new European Commission will restore those partnership tools that had previously been made available to the OR and were considered to be consolidated, in particular the OR Forum, which was an essential element for the visibility of our regions.

We claim that the strategy for the OR is the result of a process of joint construction and we request that the consolidated acquis of the outermost regions should not be called into question, avoiding any restrictive interpretation that could harm our interests.

We urge the new Commission to maintain the same level of special attention given so far to the outermost regions through the OR Unit. We ask that its interdepartmental coordination role be strengthened and that its functions evolve to allow for a more in-depth analysis of specific issues.



We welcome the Commission's willingness to invest in our potential. We therefore call for further work on strengthening the capacities of our human resources, especially in the preparation and management of European projects under cross-cutting programmes.

European Parliament

We welcome the European Parliament's latest report on the OR strategy, particularly underline its ambition to formulate proposals that go beyond the framework of the Commission's strategy and hope that it will continue to support it, with the same intensity, in the next legislative period.

Council

We hope that the Spanish Presidency will complete the work in favour of the outermost regions promoted by its predecessors, the Portuguese and French presidencies, and we expressly request to promote clear political guidelines in the conclusions of the General Affairs Council to enable the strategy for the OR to evolve in the direction indicated by the European Parliament, the States and regions in their joint position of 19 January 2022.



In a changing world confronted with successive, overlapping and unexpected crises, faced with the challenges of the economic and social transition towards a greener and more digital world, with imminent debates such as the future of cohesion policy and the solidarity-based distribution of the European budget, we still feel the need to raise awareness of our specific realities in order to continue to make progress towards a Europe that is respectful and sensitive to territorial realities.

THE AZORES

CANARY ISLANDS

GUADELOUPE

FRENCH GUIANA

MADEIRA

MARTINIQUE

MAYOTTE

LA RÉUNION

SAINT-MARTIN

