Atlantic Strategy in Action event (8 June 2016) – reports from the 3 breakout sessions

1) Reports from the French breakout session

Main points FR session, by A. LAMOTTE (moderating):

1. All the participants (except one person) were "managing authorities". Although the discussion was interesting and participants showed a real interest in the topic , the regional authorities were mostly represented by their regional representations in Brussels. So they were just passing on the messages of their respective regions.
2. The first question was on the progress they had made in embedding the Strategy and Action plan into their programmes. The national authority in charge of coordinating the planning (Commissariat Général à l'Egalité des Territoires – Coopération territorial européenne) insisted on the fact that all the regions had been informed of the Strategy and the action plan.
3. The idea of identifying the blue projects in a system was discussed during a meeting between the "Commissariat Général à l'Egalité des Territoires" and the managing authorities (regions) last December. This was well received by the managing authorities.
   In comparison with the example mentioned by Spain, France has just proposed a more simple targeting system: by saying if yes or no the project is contributing to the implementation of the Strategy and the Action Plan. It will be up to the regions to identify the projects and then to send the information to the national authority.
   An internal online platform has also been put in place to better share information between the national and regional authorities.
4. However most of the regions are at a reflection stage except for Brittany which has already created a system ("Système TAG Mer") to identify the blue projects. So far, they have identified 11 blue projects financed by FEDER. The Action Plan was also on the agenda for discussion at one of their monitoring committees.
   Britany insisted on the fact that they were not planning to favour "blue proposals" in their calls, or give extra points or launching specific calls ("appels ciblés").
5. The project promoter ("Pôle de compétitivité Aquimer") said it was difficult to identify all the sources of funding.
6. The end of the meeting was focused on the role of the "Support Team for the Atlantic Action Plan". The support team presented some projects listed as "blue project". However, their role does not really seem to be understood by the regional and national authorities (*maybe because most of the interlocutors to this meeting were from the regional representations in Brussels)*. They asked the support team to be more visible and further coordinate their work with the regional representations in Brussels and the managing authorities.

Gildas Borel – National Unit of the Atlantic Strategy Assistance Mechanism – France (rapporteur)

Summary conclusion breakout session France

Session animated by Mrs Alessandra Motte from DG MARE

The French State component represented by M Jean Luc FRES from CGET - Commissariat Général à l'Egalité des Territoires – an advising public organisation classified (as SG Mer) as a service linked to the Prime Minister. Since decentralization laws, the power of EU funds and maritime stragegy has been widely transferred to regional authorities. So the main action of this body is to favor coordination of actions within the framework of the France-EU partnership agreement and to propose common tools such as a national specific indicator for maritime issues. But M FRES specified the regions have to define their own maritime strategy.

Most of French maritime regions concerned by the Atlantic Action Plan attended the event of which:

- All from continental ("metropolitaine") France :
    - Hauts de France, new region
    - Normandie, new region
    - Brittany
    - Pays de la Loire
    - ALPC (Aquitaine Loire Poitou Charente) new region (which definitive name will be adopted shortly
- One of the 3 outermost regions :
    - Guyane

Management of the new regions has been modified (moreover recent elections led to new power in some regions such as "Pays de la Loire" and had to led to new maritime strategies. That partly explained that most of regions have just start to think about maritime strategies. However, some have progressed more in this field. Brittany (not concerned by merging or political change) has worked to adapt its maritime strategy and has created a "tag" Sea defined according to some selected criteria and have identified 11 "Sea" projects financed by 5," Millions € from ERDF. Normandy has also defined a specific indicator, as Pays de la Loire just classified projects on a yes/no base according to suitability with the maritime strategy.

This meeting and face to face discussions during coffee and lunch breaks favor meeting between National Unit France and representative of several regions at Brussels (all recently in this missions). It has been a good opportunity to establish new links (only the representative of Brittany region was already new by NU FR). This came at a very good time as NU France is developing contact with regional authorities and related services within the preparation context for regional "Roadshows".

The only sector representative was Pole Aquimer, a sea food cluster, which was interested by sources of funding in cooperative projects.

2) Reports from the Irish and UK breakout session

Main points UK-Irish session, by I. SHEPHERD (moderating)

1. The managing authorities were nearly all from territorial cooperation programmes (ie. programmes covering more than one country) rather than the programmes dedicated to a particular region. This was because they were already in Brussels for a meeting with REGIO. These programmes, of course, have always had a natural tendency to focus on maritime issues because the benefits of cooperation are clear. But the money involved is a small fraction of the total.
2. Many proposals to this programmes mentioned the Atlantic Strategy or Action Plan but this did not bring them any additional credit. However, since the objectives of the operational programmes – innovation, SMEs, low-carbon - are largely identical to those of the Action Plan, this did not matter.
3. The participants to the projects are overwhelmingly from the public sector. The Irish representative said that although SMEs can participate as "associates", State-Aid rules make private participation difficult. Some projects were designed to create the conditions for innovation but were not themselves designed to generate revenue.
4. The procedures are still too bureaucratic. Smaller educational establishments find themselves at a disadvantage compared to the larger ones. Even the larger ones complain.
5. It is early days but there are some promising projects Flooding, aquaculture, renewable energy and tourism were mentioned. Ole Damsgaard from the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme Secretariat mentioned projects on sea urchins, recycling marine litter and tourism routes for sailors. We should find out more about them.

Amaya Vega – National Unit of the Atlantic Strategy Assistance Mechanism – Ireland (rapporteur)

Summary conclusion breakout session Ireland and the UK

Session animated by Mr Iain Shepherd from DG MARE

- How much progress has been made in spending plans/operational programmes? – Ireland: increased budget. Increased level of intervention to projects as well. The AAP will be assisted by the Atlantic area programme.

- Scotland has integrated the AAP as part of the soft smart specialisation strategy in Scotland. Good engagement in implementation of Atlantic action plan.
- Northern periphery: Overlap in priorities in the operational programme and the strategy, but no project has been funded exclusively because it contributes to the Atlantic strategy. There is a contribution to the strategy, but it is more indirect.
- AS well fitted in operational programmes. It would be very important to consider them as part of any application as a key requisite to get funded.
- Are projects aimed at generating an income as an outcome? Yes. An objective to support new business. However, it is important to be realistic – the scale is smaller. They complement the commercial side, but they scale is smaller. It is not like h2020
- One of the objectives is to link h2020 (research projects) with ESF projects.
- Approach taken in Scotland – use ERDF programmes to get to h2020. Current discussion about to what extent these funded projects may become viable business in the future.
- There will be an evaluation of the AAP in 2017, but what is going to be evaluated? What difference does it make?
- Difficulties (ST): Areas of interest not covered by current programmes, for example marine education and training.
- Part of the success of the Baltic Sea strategy is that is contributed to the operational programmes. Value in working more collaborative – support team and project promoters

3) Reports from the Portuguese and Spanish breakout session

Main points Spain and Portugal session, by J. RONCO (moderating)

- The participants to this session were, for the most part, representatives from Managing Authorise, thus we had in the room the "target group" of the event.
- Both Member States (ES, PT) have developed an "Integrated Territorial Investment" (or ITI) tool specifically targeting the blue economy. In Spain is called "ITI Azul" and in Portugal "ITI Mare". The latter is supposed to be a truly Atlantic ITI as Portugal's regions have all an Atlantic coast. The Spanish one might cover non-Atlantic regions but the bulk of the spending will take place in the Atlantic.
- More cooperation, and communication, among Managing Authorities from Atlantic Member States is possible, and needed. An example of this came to the surface when the Spanish and the Portuguese participants presented their "ITIs", it came out that they did not know of each other instruments. A concrete positive outcome was thus that they are going to exchange information on "ITI Azul" and "ITI Mare"
- If not possible to positively discriminate in "favour" of Atlantic, then the alternative could be to empower Atlantic Stakeholders and project promoters to take as much advantage as possible from all available funds. The Spanish put the example of another ITI, this time specifically designed for the province of Cádiz (Andalusia). The main purpose of this ITI is to make sure that stakeholders in this territory are best informed and helped to obtain financial support for their projects and initiatives, coming from all available instruments. Here is the link (in Spanish) providing information on this ITI http://www.dgfc.sgpg.meh.es/sitios/dgfc/es-ES/ipr/fcp1420/p/ITICadiz/Paginas/ITICadiz.aspx
- "Financial Instruments" could be used to channel EU funds to specific Atlantic Areas and to finance 100% of the project amount: the Spanish participants referred to the so called "financial instruments" (e.g. setting aside part of the subsidy money to set-up a loan facility) as a possibility to support initiatives and projects in a geographical area. The advantage of this "financial instruments" is also that say, a loan, can finance or help support 100% of the total amount of a project.
- Indicators and monitoring: Managing authorities see this as a main challenge. In Spain they are reflecting on how best design indicators to ensure a follow up of financing of actions and projects that could be related to the Atlantic Strategy and Action Plan.

Jorge Garcia – National Unit of the Atlantic Strategy Assistance Mechanism – Portugal (rapporteur)

Summary conclusion breakout session Portugal and Spain

Session animated by Mr Juan Ronco from DG MARE

The discussion lead to the following findings:

- both Portugal and Spain have developed ITI strategies (Integrated Territorial Investment) by combining different European funds in the same territory, in this case for the benefit of the Blue Economy. ITI Mar for Portugal and ITI Azul for Spain;

- both countries have their national and regional strategies (Smart Specialisation) aligned with the Atlantic Strategy, and as well as the financial instruments that were defined in terms of these strategies, hence contributing to the objectives of the Atlantic Strategy;

- the calls for projects do not usually discriminate projects aligned with the Atlantic Strategy, but the calls usually touch upon topics that benefit the Blue Economy, and so the Atlantic Strategy.

The following challenges were put forward:

- For DG Mare / Commission - to promote an internal work to make the relationship of EU funds with the objectives of the Atlantic Strategy clear, so that the connection can then be perceived at the Member States' level;

- For Portugal and Spain - to promote cooperation among the ITIs, taking into account that the objectives and the territory are similar;

- For the managing authorities - to raise awareness about the Atlantic Strategy so that they can launch calls that benefit projects aligned with the Atlantic Strategy, promoting an effective influence of the Atlantic Strategy on the existing funding programs;

- For the AAP Support Team - where the prioritization / discrimination referred above is not possible, an alternative is to invest in information to potential project promoters, motivating them to explore the opportunities arising from the Blue Economy promoted by the Atlantic Strategy;

- For the Commission and Member-States - place emphasis on the definition of the appropriate indicators needed to measure the impact of the Atlantic Strategy and its effective implementation through the analysis of the approved projects;

- For the Member-States - use the Structural Funds to create a thematic fund dedicated to projects of the Atlantic Strategy (financial instrument).

Annex: Guidance for <u>moderators</u> of the breakout sessions

<u>WHAT?</u>

These sessions are dedicated sessions at Member State level, involving mainly Managing Authorities, National Units of the "Support Team for the Atlantic Action Plan", Commission staff (DG REGIO, DG MARE), project promoters…

To discuss:

1) Stocktaking in the implementation of the Strategy and the Action Plan: areas of interest, problems.

2) Covering the gap between available programme funding and projects: project and project ideas, available funding.

3) Next steps: how to better cooperate and reinforce each other initiatives and actions, for ex. national units, contact persons from the Interreg programmes, managing authorities, other initiatives/bodies in the area, etc.

<u>WHO WILL BE IN THE BREAK-OUT SESSIONS?</u>

The break out sessions will be attended by participants grouped per Member State. It can happen that some Member States we will be brought together in the same room (e.g. UK+IE, ES+PT).

There will be two main categories of participants in the room:

- *"Funds managers": to this category belong mainly Managing Authorities from Member States that are in charge of making sure that "shared managed funds" are spent as foreseen in the different implementing instruments (e.g. National/Regional "Operational Programmes"). Note that staff from Brussels Offices representing regional bodies may attend instead of staff from capitals or from regions.*
- *"Project promoters": this category might include stakeholders who in need of financing.*

Officials from Permanent Representations or from capitals of Atlantic Member States might also participate. Some of these officials might play a role in the Atlantic Strategy and Action Plan; more specifically they can be members of the "Atlantic Strategy Group"[1].

In the room there will be also ***at least one member of the corresponding "National Unit" of the Support Team for the Atlantic Action Plan.*** *This is a key participant as he/she will be there to learn (more) about the funding possibilities offered by the national/regional bodies represented in the room, but also about the possible initiatives for which project promoters need funding).* ***They will be the Rapporteurs for each of the rooms.***

<u>HOW? SCRIPT FOR THE MODERATION OF THE BREAK-OUT SESSIONS</u>

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[1] *This Group provides high level steer and political impulse and is made up of representatives of the five Atlantic Member States, the EU Institutions (European Parliament, Commission, Economic and Social Committee and Committee of the Regions).*

The purpose is to have a lively, interactive discussion in these sessions so you should invite participants to:

HAVE A TOUR DE TABLE and let participants introduce themselves (name, organisation they are representing, main duties)

FIRST: "FUND MANAGERS" TO SPEAK (ask for volunteers if needed). Put the following questions:

- *How much progress has been made in embedding the Atlantic Strategy and Action Plan into spending plans/ Operational Programmes in your country/region?*
- *In other words, are programmes, calls for proposals, etc, being launched in your country/region that cover the Atlantic area or the priorities and/or actions included in the Action Plan?*
- *What are the difficulties / challenges you encounter in making EU-funds work for the Strategy and the Action Plan: lack of funds, no specific programming, no interesting project/initiatives?*
- *What need to be addressed to make progress in future?*

SECOND: PROJECT PROMOTERS TO SPEAK (ask for volunteers if needed). Put the following questions:

- *Have you received funds for your project coming from national/regional programmes financed with EU funds (e.g. regional funds)*
- *What, for you, is the added value of launching projects under the auspices of the Atlantic Action Plan?*

THIRD: ROLE OF THE SUPPORT TEAM FOR ATLANTIC ACTION PLAN. Put the following question to all:

- *How can the Atlantic Action Plan Support Team help to build that trust and, more generally, is there anything more it can do in its role as a 'matchmaker' for potential partners and to help develop successful partnerships between the public and private sectors, research institutions and investors?*

CONCLUSION – WRAP-UP: a*t the end of the discussion try to draw some conclusions. Ask the audience a 'wrap-up' question such as this one:*

- *If you had to identify just one priority for action now to build on the progress to date and realise the full potential of the Atlantic region – by working through the Action Plan to help to meet the challenges and make the most of the opportunities - what would it be?*