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Panel 3: Ms SIOLI – Mr. PITTALUGA – Mr. GULTZHOFF – Mr. RUIJTERS – Mr. ZELLER – Mr. VIRAPOULLÉ – Mr. JESUS

Panel 4: Mr. VON VRESKA – Mr. DUMITRU – Mr. SERRÃO SANTOS – Ms GAYOSO – Mr. RODRIGUES – Mr. SIDI – Mr. DUVILLE
REPORT OF THE FOURTH FORUM of ORs 2017

1. Fourth Forum of the Outermost Regions

“The Outermost Regions, European lands in the world: toward a renewed strategy”

2. DATES, LOCATION

30/31 March, 2017, Brussels (Charlemagne building)

3. PARTICIPANTS

658 participants were present (the official delegation from St Martin was not able to attend the forum due to local elections; similarly, the majority of the Guyanese delegation could not attend as they were detained in Cayenne due to social conflict).

Outermost regions: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana, St. Martin, Réunion, Mayotte, the Azores, Madeira, Canary Islands: 177 delegates including the Presidents of the Region, regional institutions and experts

Member States: France, Portugal, Spain (184 participants), including ministers, ambassadors, national institutions and experts.

European institutions: the European Commission (145 participants), including the President of the European Commission, 2 European Commissioners, 6 MEPs and their delegations, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions.

Socio-economic representatives: 103 participants (in addition to which 129 participants were included in the official delegations of the ORs, making a total of 232 socio-professionals), among which were the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, business associations and individual companies.

Journalists: 49 invited attendees.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE FORUM

Provide the outermost regions (ORs) with a platform for valuing their assets with regard to public and private key players.

Facilitate a public debate to prepare for the renewal of the European Commission strategy in favour of the outermost regions. This strategy will be the subject of a communication from
the Commission and will be adopted in the autumn of 2017. This strategy will take into account the results of the Forum, the memorandum given to President Juncker at the Forum by the President of the Conference of Presidents of ORs, contributions from Member States, members of the European Parliament, and other partners.

Invigorate the current programming process for the 2014-2020 period on the basis of global European strategic priorities and on a partnership basis with the outermost regions to ensure smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Refocus thinking on four strategic themes for the outermost regions: the circular economy, the green and blue economy, energy; the integration of the outermost regions in regional and international markets; digital and physical accessibility; support programmes and European funds.

5. KEY POINTS OF THE FORUM (30/03/2017)

30 March 2017

Introductory speeches (summary):

Corina CREȚU (European Commissioner for regional policy)

Commissioner CREȚU welcomed participants and indicated that she had already visited several ORs, namely Guadeloupe, Réunion and the autonomous Region of Madeira. This had allowed her to gain knowledge of the challenges faced by these regions.

She sent a message of support to President Alexandre who was detained in Guyana facing a difficult social situation. This crisis illustrates how necessary it is to unite our efforts and strengthen the action of the European Union on behalf of the outermost regions.

2017 is proving to be uncertain for the future of the European Union, but also for the ORs. Brexit, immigration, and growing inequality all call into question the founding values of Europe, particularly openness, diversity, freedom, and democracy.

President JUNCKER delivered a clear message for the future of Europe and we need to bridge the gap between what citizens expect from Europe, and the reality of what Europe is able to provide.

A strong European project requires widespread public debate and a consideration of the aspirations of our citizens; the presence here of more than 658 participants who have travelled long distances to attend is reassuring for the future of the outermost regions.

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1 To access all speeches made during the Forum, please refer to the full recordings: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/conferences/rupt2017/

Furthermore, the main findings and lines agreed upon during the Forum are inserted in point 6, "main findings and conclusions".

At a time when several parts of the world are retreating into a protective bubble, the ORs are the bridge between Europe and the world, and this is truly valuable. In particular, with regard to cooperation and exchanges.

The distance that separates the outermost regions from Europe should not be seen as a disadvantage and their status has already been recognised through treaties that have been reinforced by the decision of December 15, 2015 of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).

Commissioner CREŢU pointed out that several instruments financed by the EU budget allowed support to be given to the ORs: the cohesion policy, POSEI, programmes prioritising agriculture, and many others. They provide solutions to their problems and their aspirations, and it is up to the ORs to join together their energies and make best use of these financial instruments.

Ms CREŢU reminded participants that she coordinates all decisions related to the ORs within the college of Commissioners. She is working with her colleagues to prepare a new renewed strategy that needs to indicate the direction to be taken for the years to come. It also needs to overcome the challenges facing the outermost regions, beyond their own specificities.

The renewed strategy must provide answers in three areas: what is the vision for the future of the outermost regions in the next 10 to 15 years; how can their aspirations be met; and what action can Europe take?

The strategy is dependent upon commitment and intense work jointly undertaken by the Commission, Member States, and regional and local authorities.

The outermost regions play a key role in the formation of a strong Europe.

- Antonio TAJANI, President of the European Parliament (video message)

The outermost regions are an integral part of Europe and inhabitants of the ORs are fully-fledged European citizens.

Europe should support these regions and continue its efforts in the fishing sector and modernisation of the fleet, taking into account their specific requirements in terms of economic matters, particularly in the face of competition from non-member countries and in the context of globalised trade and exchanges.

On the legal basis of article 349 TFEU, Europe must start a new chapter in its partnership with the outermost regions.

- Rodolphe ALEXANDRE, President of the Conference of Presidents of the Outermost Regions (video message)

The President regrets that he is not able to be physically present due to a major social crisis taking place in Guyana.

He indicated that the Guyanese people feel abandoned by Paris and that they want solutions to be found to solve their economic difficulties, issues relating to a lack of security, and a lack of public services, particularly hospitals.

He hoped that concrete responses would be conveyed by the two ministers present at the Forum.
Brexit is the result of a brutal social withdrawal from the people of Europe, exacerbated by the migration crisis, which some outermost regions have been particularly affected by.

This Forum must be an opportunity for meeting and sharing between peoples, but also for considering the specificity of the ORs, supported by the decision of the Court of Justice dated December 15, 2015.

The European Union must still adapt to the reality of the ORs, particularly when it comes to competition from non-member countries such as Vietnam or Ecuador. The revision of the GBER and the consideration of dock dues are positive elements in this context.

The adaptation of aviation regulations must provide greater benefit to the outermost regions in order to facilitate mobility among young people.

A better articulation of EAFRD/ERDF is also essential to support the traditional channels.

The implementation of a fisheries POSEI programme is needed to help this sector, which is facing strong competition from the illegal practices of neighbouring countries. Aid measures for the renewal of the fishing fleet should also be developed.

The issue of climate change is of importance to the ORs, as it generates new plant healthcare issues, which need to be taken into account.

Maintaining cohesion is essential for the post-2020 period; Europe must remain a hope for the people of the ORs, and the future communication presented by the Commission will act as a strong signal of the renewed approach.

Speeches by senior representatives of the Member States:

- **Alfonso DASTIS QUECEDO**, Minister for External Affairs and Cooperation, Spain.

Europe is celebrating 60 years of the Treaty of Rome and the notion of ORs has gradually enjoyed complete recognition over successive treaties. Appropriate measures that take into account their specificities and their needs have gradually been adopted and the problems of these regions have been taken into account, in particular, with regard to state aid, cost overruns, and fishing...

The decision of the Court of Justice of 15 December, 2015 reinforced the status of ORs in their statute by strengthening legal recognition of the enforcement of article 349 TFEU with respect to matters concerning the ORs.

This opened up new perspectives and encouraged engagement in the renewal process of the strategy developed by the European Commission.

The ORs have enormous potential, which must be explored in its entirety; targeted impact studies must strengthen the partnership between the Commission and these regions in order to make best use of their strengths within the policies of the EU.

As such, the unit in charge of the outermost regions within DG REGIO plays a key role in this partnership.

- **Margarida MARQUES**, State Secretary for European Affairs, Portugal.

The European Commission plays an essential role in discussions held on the topic of development of the ORs.

The Commission (DG REGIO) must continue its work on their behalf and defend their potential in the areas of accessibility, social cohesion, fishing, trade, and digital technology, in particular energy, which are all driving forces behind their economic development. It must also defend their interests in the face of the Directorates General of the Commission, which are not always sensitive to the specific nature of the ORs.
The Commissioner should be the advocate for the outermost regions during the next Cohesion Forum.

The evolution of the concept of 'outermost' goes beyond the difficulties encountered by these regions. Their assets should be valued, and they are an example of openness in the face of a sense of withdrawal perceived across the European continent. Their geostrategic positioning means they can provide many opportunities for development with high added value.

European policies that benefit them must be strong.

- Jean-Marie LE GUEN, Secretary of State for Development and Francophonie, France.

The Minister presented apologies from the French Overseas Minister, who was detained in Guyana.

He noted that the ORs must be fully integrated within the European Union. They must be the subject of a dynamic vision, even if they encounter difficulties, particularly with regard to the high level of unemployment among young people. Europe must show solidarity with the ORs, and for this reason, the Minister welcomes the commitment of Commissioner CREȚU on their behalf.

The collective GDP of all the ORs is 100 billion euros and it is thanks to its outermost regions that Europe is a great maritime power. The French outermost regions benefit from more than 7 billion euros of European funds, but the procedures for compiling the files need to be simplified. The ERDF/EAFRD link also needs to be improved.

Finally, steps should be taken to seize the opportunities offered by the "Juncker plan", especially in relation to research and development.

Free trade should not lead to unfair competition from non-member countries, particularly in the agricultural sector.

The Minister welcomed the willingness of the Commission to develop a renewed strategy in favour of the outermost regions within the context of the new communication being prepared.

Speeches by senior representatives of the outermost regions:

- Vasco CORDEIRO, President of the Regional Government of the Azores.

The President noted that the current period is atypical on an international level. In this context, he hoped that the findings of this forum would be acted upon and that this meeting would not simply be used as a way of easing the conscience of those actors involved.

The strategy of the European Commission must rely on article 349 TFEU as consolidated by the decision of the Court of Justice of December 15, 2015.

The cohesion policy must still be strengthened, including by means of increased financial resources.

He wants the future strategy to be ambitious for the post-2020 period.

- Fernando CLAVIJO, President of the Government of the Canary Islands.

The European Union must respect the outermost regions, and this is the very essence of the Memorandum that will be presented to President Juncker.

He recognises, however, that the situation of the outermost regions would be very difficult without the support of the European Union.

In the face of difficulties, the new strategy, implemented under the framework of the next communication, represents hope and is an important step for the ORs, who have to deal with the many challenges facing these regions.
- Ary CHALUS, President of the Regional Council of Guadeloupe.

The President agrees with the concept of the renewed strategy, but he wants citizens to be placed at the heart of European policies. The main challenge for the ORs is employment, which is essential for societal cohesion. The message conveyed by the Conference of Presidents marks the commitment of the ORs to Europe and its solidarity.

The judgement of the EU Court of Justice on article 349 is historical and should strengthen European policy in favour of the outermost regions, in particular with regard to the fishing industry and modernisation of the fleet (approval of State aid is essential in this case), the connection of the ORs to the "Motorways of the Sea", and the modernisation of ports deemed essential for improving physical accessibility.

- Miguel ALBURQUERQUE, President of the Regional Government of Madeira.

The ORs are essential to the new global scene. They ensure Europe’s presence in the Atlantic, the Indian ocean, the Caribbean, and South America – their value is paramount. The difficulties facing Guyana highlight their own specific characteristics.

The ORs have high expectations of the European Commission, which must demonstrate its flexibility and adapt to said expectations, particularly with regard to competition law. It must also continue to support them in the areas of transport, energy and fishing.

The main concern of the ORs remains youth unemployment, and it is still necessary to develop European policies to this end.

- Alfred MARIE-JEANNE, President of the Territorial Collectivity of Martinique.

The European Union was created 60 years ago. What does it look like now? Euroscepticism, Brexit, the revival of protectionism...

We must return to the founding values of the European Union – unity and solidarity – and rethink both the present and the future.

This forum is an opportunity to regain these values and define a path best suited to the development of the ORs, particularly on the basis of the Memorandum that will be presented to President Juncker.

The ORs sometimes feel that the aid granted to developing non-member countries is to their detriment. The outermost regions face the same problem as the OCTs, and they should be dealt with in the same way. Measures such as the ban on State aid for the renewal of fishing fleets are not acceptable.

The ORs represent potential that could be harnessed; renewable energy, maritime links, climate change, green and blue growth, the circular economy – all these areas are reaching out to Europe in their capacity as a partner of the European Union.

- Soibahadine Ibrahim RAMADANI, President of the Mayotte Departmental Council.

This forum is held within a particular context: 60 years of the Treaty of Rome, the rise of nationalism, social unrest in Guyana, which is similar to the situation in Mayotte. This island is the poorest region in Europe, its GDP per capita is the lowest, it has the highest unemployment rate and it has seen very strong population growth. Mahorans are very attached to their identity and their culture.

Mayotte is, however, ten times richer than the other islands of the Comoros, which attract substantial irregular immigration. By becoming an outlying region, Mayotte has been able to take on another dimension, but three years is not sufficient to gauge the positive effects; the vision of the development must be noted on a generational scale. Mayotte is strongly linked to Europe and is aware of the help it has received from the latter. There remains much to do:
sanitation, roads, transport, education, social issues... 7 million euros of European funds have been made available for Mayotte, thus demonstrating Europe's commitment to its development.

- **Didier ROBERT**, President of the Regional Council of Réunion.

The crisis in Guyana affects every one of the ORs. The Guyanese despair results from a shared responsibility and the fact that the difficulties faced by the ORs are seldom acknowledged. Major decisions concerning them are made in Paris based on financial and accounting reasoning.

This forum should be an opportunity to engage in a new dynamic, which is precisely why the President would also like to thank Commissioner CREŢU for her involvement on behalf of the outermost regions. There is, however, still progress to be made. We do not necessarily have to do more, but rather, do better. The drafting of the Memorandum presented to President Juncker was initiated over the course of the Conference of Presidents held in Funchal. It comes down to fundamentally changing the European framework in favour of the outermost regions and gaining a better understanding of Europe. The goal of the text is to rebuild relations between the European Commission and the ORs. The decision of the Court of Justice on the scope of article 349 must now be rigorously applied, and must be used to support the accessibility and competitiveness of the ORs, while ensuring coherence between European policies and measures adopted in favour of the outermost regions.

Too many regulations are counter-productive and are nonsensical in respect of the ORs. Guaranteeing the principle of free movement requires putting an end to this lack of territorial continuity, which affects the movement of people and goods between continental Europe and the remotest ORs.

It it also necessary to adapt procedures for State aid or those relating to the European trade policy. For example, it should be taken into consideration that State aid generating a purely local impact does not affect competition as a result of the remoteness of the OR markets, and therefore authorising export aid should be considered. It is also the role of France and the EU to weigh in on the negotiations of the 11th WTO conference and to put in place exceptional arrangements to authorise aid for fishing fleets in the outermost regions.

**Speeches by senior officials of the European Union:**

- **Younous OMARJEE**, MEP, Conference of the members of the ORs in the European Parliament.

The numerous strategies being implemented should lead to concrete measures. The future strategy is a strong signal for the attention of the College of Commissioners, but should not be an additional element in the stacking up of laws that fail to eliminate the violence of decisions that have weakened the economy of the outermost regions over time, including the disappearance of quotas that guaranteed a minimum price for rum or in fishing or sugar sectors.

It is necessary to establish coherence between European policies and to strongly rely on article 349.

Defending the interests of the ORs involves the support and unity of all political groups represented in the European Parliament, but substantive files should not overshadow the urgency of the situation, as illustrated by the crisis in Guyana.

- **Ian BORG**, Parliamentary Secretary for the Maltese Presidency 2017 and European Funds.

The specific nature of the outermost regions is recognised by the treaties.
Steps should be taken to place their challenges at the centre of European concerns, notably by improving people’s access to public services and by adopting European decisions for better socially inclusive growth.

There are many similarities between the ORs and other European Islands who do not benefit from this special status. Insularity is a common characteristic. Under the Maltese presidency, there must be a commitment to lines of approach that will achieve converging solutions.

- Georgios DASSIS, President of the European Economic and Social Council.

The EESC is aware of the issues surrounding ORs.

We are celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, which helped to ensure a long period of peace in Europe.

The Commission must pursue a specific policy in favour of the outermost regions as it is not there to strictly carry out the orders of the Council. It must position itself as a defender of these regions.

Meanwhile, the EESC will continue to cooperate with the civil and social authorities of the ORs, and will continue a dialogue with their Presidents and representatives of DG REGIO for the adaptation of concrete measures intended to promote the economic and social cohesion of these regions.

- Luc VAN DEN BRANDE, member and former President of the Committee of Regions.

The President welcomes the initiative of this forum as an example of participatory democracy.

The ORs are essential for the European Union, particularly as a result of their unique ecosystems. The ORs are, however, facing complex social challenges in terms of social cohesion, particularly due to high youth unemployment and their inability to enter the labour market.

All the key players in our society must be mobilised. A complete territorial assessment of this problem is necessary and the issue should not be discussed behind closed doors.

The free movement of persons is a fundamental freedom, but the freedom to find work and support one’s needs and those of one’s family in one’s region of origin is another that should not be obscured.

Closing speech of the inaugural session by Mr Marc LEMAITRE, Director-General of the Department for Regional and Urban Policy.

The Director General noted that he had played a role in the strategy developed by the Commission in favour of the outermost regions in 2008, and that he was one of the initiators of this forum.

He notes that progress made since 2008 has been perceptible and he stresses the key role that DG REGIO has played to this end.

The outermost regions must seize the opportunities available to them in their geographic vicinity.

They are part of a strong movement and a broader process that began in 2016; one of the outcomes is the renewal of the strategy marked by the publication of a new communication next autumn.

These reflections should lead to innovative measures. The work carried out by MEP Younous OMARJEE, the Memorandum presented to President JUNCKER by the Presidents of the
outermost regions, national contributions, and the discussions within this forum, will all help
guide the new strategy implemented by the Commission in favour of the outermost regions.

31 March 2017

6. Introductory speeches (31/03/2017)

Corina CREŢU, European Commissioner for Regional Policy.

The Commissioner would like to thank the President of the Commission for attending, and
she points out that the work done on March 30 has proved to be particularly fruitful and
should lead to concrete proposals.

Jean-Claude JUNCKER, President of the European Commission.

The President recalled the dedication he made to the ORs, “European lands in the world and
European at heart”. This sends a message to Guyana, which is dealing with some difficult
social circumstances at the moment.

The status of the outermost regions is sometimes poorly known, even though such regions are
noble representatives of Europe in the world.

It is a partnership that is engaged with the ORs and it is not a relationship of condescension,
but rather a partnership that requires faith and patience.

This fourth forum is particularly important as it is taking place just after the 60th anniversary
of the Treaty of Rome.

It must prepare for the future as part of a renewed strategy presented by Commissioner
CREŢU, which draws attention to the outermost regions. This strategy must be based on a
real dialogue and acquired knowledge of the specificities of the poorly known outermost
regions.

The constraints faced by the ORs are recognised and this recognition forms the heart of the
treaties; only a specific approach can overcome their difficulties and this specific approach
has been strengthened by the decision of the European Court of Justice of 15 December,
2015. This solid basis must provide new impetus to the joint partnership and will enable the
outermost regions to take better advantage of their remarkable assets.

European funds and the cohesion policy, by means of structuring projects, have resulted in
visible changes for our citizens, be they in the field of education with the ERASMUS
programme, digital technology (e.g. cable, etc.), provision of electricity to remote areas, etc.

In addition, the ORs also have specific interests to defend in terms of trade policies and they
can count on the support of Commissioner Malmström to help them accordingly.

The European Fund for Strategic Investments (‘the Juncker Plan’) is intended to facilitate new
investments and must contribute to improving the economic situation of the outermost
regions by promoting the creation of jobs, especially for young people particularly affected
by unemployment.

However, we should not believe that Europe has an answer for everything as this will give
rise to false hopes. Do not believe that Europe is responsible for everything; many issues are
the responsibility of the Member States who should not "hide behind the Commission”.

The principle of subsidiarity is wise and necessary, and the ORs should help the Commission
to enforce it.

The ORs should be proud of what they are, an example for Europe, and rich in their diversity.
Their assets, particularly in the field of energy transition, the circular economy, and biodiversity, for example, are also assets for the whole of Europe.

The ORs are neither remote nor forgotten; at a time when some countries are turning inward, they extend the influence of Europe throughout the world.

The President confirms that he will travel to one of the outermost regions before the end of his term.

7. **Presentation of the findings from the thematic sessions – speeches by rapporteurs.**

7.1. Session theme 1: Strengthening competitiveness and employment in the Outermost Regions: the circular, green and blue economies, energy: Sieglinde GRUBER. Summary of the panel.

Mr. Dominique RISTORI, *Director General DG ENER* –

Mr. Pierre-Emmanuel NOEL, *representative of the European Investment Bank in Belgium* - the EIB and the Outermost Regions: New Financing Opportunities

Mr. Laurent BLERIOT, *President of Bioalgostral, Réunion* – the structuring of a production chain of micro algae on the island of Réunion

Mr. Pedro ORTEGA RODRIGUES, Advisor on the Economy, Industry, Trade and Knowledge, Government of the Canary Islands – Canaries in the context of circular economy: energy and waste (Canarias en el contexto de la economía circular. Energía y residuos)

Ms Marta GUERREIRO, *Member of the Regional Government of the Azores, Regional Secretary for Energy, the Environment and Tourism* – “Strengthening competitiveness and employment in the ORs: The green and blue circular economies and energy”.

7.1.1. Shared findings

The ORs have significant natural resources and a strong potential to develop and produce renewable energy: more sun and wind than in continental Europe. They also have constant temperatures and mild climatic conditions, for the production of algae for example; they are also natural centres for tourism. They still under exploit the potential of oceanic energy (sailors, tides, waves, etc.).

The islands are ideal for turning into living laboratories and for demonstrating, for example, the use of new energy technologies for independent clean energy solutions; (they are also centres of the circular economy). In this context, and taking into account such specificities as the small size of the market and the higher investment costs, the ORs may need particular financial and regulatory support to implement such a scenario.

The ORs are in an excellent position to exploit the world of tourism, which could stimulate growth and contribute to increased competitiveness and the fight against unemployment.

In order to derive the most benefit from these actions, the need to promote initial training was stressed, as well as ongoing training to develop the skills of the workforce (for young people, but also for older workers). The appearance of new professional profiles (due, for example, to the new energy mix, digital technology, the circular economy, etc.); the development of skills must be adapted in order to enable young people or the workforce in a broader economic
context to apply, or to adapt and test new technology (be it the production thereof or waste management systems under the circular economy).

7.1.2. Mechanisms and tools to mobilise

Given the size of the local market, the measures and objectives must be adapted to local conditions (e.g. energy or financing objectives); local specificities must be the starting point and must receive special support (including financial support).

Due to the fact that it is linked to activities related to energy transition or the implementation of large-scale circular economy projects, it is necessary to work in order to receive acceptance at a local level, and political support both at a local and European level. Indeed, drawing attention to these various changes is crucial, and young people are the agents of change.

In addition, the outermost regions have not yet sufficiently made use of EIB loans (which reflect the classic role of the EIB) or the investment plan for Europe (SIF or the Juncker Plan). Mr. NOEL was invited to use the Council platform and its team of experts for free, as this could provide considerable support in the preparation of projects.

The process to access EU funds is too long and complex for businesses in a start-up phase; a year to process an application is too long and the process should be simplified.

It is necessary to simplify the rules, or even to consider exemptions, as already mentioned, for example for the treatment of waste with neighbouring non-member countries. It is important to share the positive experiences. The transfer of technology to neighbouring countries, which could lead to reciprocal benefits, was noted as a good example to follow.

Mr. Ristori recalled the potential of the Commission's different initiatives: clean energy for all Europeans, including the outermost regions, and in particular, the next ‘Sustainable Energy for the Islands' initiative, which will be presented this summer.

The last point relates to the common agricultural policy (CAP) of the EU, which is supported by the ORs, particularly with regard to Pillar I, by means of the POSEI scheme, and Pillar II through rural development programmes; both of them interact. There is a strong coherence between the two programmes. This is crucial in order to achieve the objectives of the CAP in light of the interdependence between the measures of the two pillars.

7.1.3. Best practices

The examples of the Canary Islands and the Azores showed how natural capital and rich biodiversity can contribute to wealth creation. The Canary Islands are recognised as a renewable energy laboratory; the Azores have based their development on their region's nature and culture, and are enjoying very good results in terms of packaging recycling.

The micro-algae project in Réunion: how to collect data on the value chain relating to the production of micro-algae (cosmetic products, feeding of animals, food, biofuels, etc.). All of this has created a new niche market without competition for the use of the land (and in addition, algae captures CO2!). International partnerships have been developed with Germany, the Netherlands and Madeira.
7.2. Session theme 2: Building a sustainable future: possibilities for better integrating the outermost regions into their regional and international markets. Lea ANDERSSON PENCH. Summary of the Panel.

Interactive debate based on contributions from the following panellists:

Mr. Miguel CEBALLOS, Deputy Chief of the Cabinet, Ms Cecilia MÄLSTRÖM, Trade Commissioner

Mr. Charles GIUSTI, Deputy Director-General, Ministry of Overseas Territories

Mr. Michel MAGRAS, President of the Overseas Senatorial Delegation and Senator of Saint-Barthélemy - trade policy, agricultural standards, for better comprehension of the ORs, resolutions passed by the Senate

Ms. Montserrat BARRIGA, International Projects Manager BINTER - International expansion case BINTER

Mr. Ary CHALUS, President of the Regional Council of Guadeloupe –

Mr. Marc CHAKHTOURA, Director of the Saint-Martin Initiative – St. Martin Initiative, for employment and economic development in St. Martin

7.2.1. The findings

– In the case of many trade agreements negotiated by the EU at a global level, the interests of the outermost regions were taken into account in a different way: the specific protection regime (dock dues, for example), local products (including sugar and bananas), and specific safeguard clauses. However, improvements still need to be made at all levels, particularly with regard to the dialogue between the Commission, Member States and the outermost regions, covering all stages, from negotiation to the implementation of trade agreements. Impact studies are an important tool and the outermost regions, including representatives of civil society, are encouraged to share their positions and opinions during public consultations, as well as during negotiations.

– Another issue raised focused on sanitary and phytosanitary standards and the strong competition between the outermost regions and non-member countries; in this context, the issue of 'organic produce' in the banana sector was raised. Although any biological product imported into the EU, including in the banana sector, should be produced in accordance with "equivalent" standards, the outermost regions have expressed their concerns. The Commission noted that it had proposed a reform to ensure that products imported into the EU from non-member countries that were not equivalent must comply with the EU's regulations on organic produce regulations.

– Trade agreements also create opportunities for exports, particularly at an intra regional level, including services. The ORs can provide quality services and position themselves on the non-member state markets.

– The requirement to show a 'made in Europe' label has also been highlighted, as well as the importance of strengthening exchanges between entrepreneurs in the outermost regions and neighbouring countries and regions.
7.2.2. Mechanisms and tools to mobilise

– INTERREG programmes can support joint actions and promote the development of a joint approach to tackle common challenges such as climate change, biodiversity, and the management of natural hazards. INTERREG can also be a good tool for boosting the regional mobility of students and entrepreneurs.

– At the level of the EU, under the framework of the COSME programme, the "Enterprise Europe Network" (EEN) encourages SMEs to innovate, grow and extend cross-border cooperation, both within the EU and with non-member countries. The outermost regions can benefit from EEN offices in their region to disseminate their international activities and receive advice on issues related to the EU single market, EU funding opportunities, and other services provided by the network.

– In addition, "Erasmus for young entrepreneurs", still under the COSME framework programme, offers new entrepreneurs the opportunity to be welcomed abroad by other entrepreneurs in Europe, as well as those in other countries and overseas territories.

7.2.3. Best practices

– A good example was presented by a representative of the corporate sector attending on behalf of an airline in the Canary Islands that connects the islands with each other, and internationally with West Africa and Portugal. Despite specific difficulties (political instability, bureaucracy, poor infrastructure and weak local demand, competing companies were widely supported by their respective governments, etc.), there are still opportunities to succeed.

– Also presented was an innovative initiative from Saint Martin, the 'Active St. Martin Initiative'. This helps aspiring entrepreneurs with micro-credit thanks to the financial support of the EU. Several practical examples of small business projects have currently been implemented with the support of EU funding.

– The experience of Guadeloupe as a managing authority of the INTERREG Caribbean programme, was of particular note in relation to stronger coordination between the two European funds of ERDF and FED. For the 2014-2020 programming period, the regional Council of Guadeloupe is managing a budget of EUR 3 million originating from the regional programme for the Caribbean, and is using this to support ACP partners under the INTERREG programme.

7.2.4. Courses of action identified

– Trade initiatives that include representatives from the outermost regions in the delegation from their own Member State when attending discussions on trade agreements – as was the case with the Cariforum economic partnership agreement – should be replicated elsewhere.

– Furthering trade among the outermost regions and between the outermost regions and neighbouring countries in the same regional area should be encouraged and supported.

– The EU and Member States can help pave the way for other flourishing businesses in the vicinity of the ORs and on the international markets. This can be achieved not only by means of financial support, but also through regulatory changes, including a lightening of the
bureaucratic load, facilitation of visas to enable mobility, and access to financing and investment in infrastructure.

– As regards the FED-ERDF coordination, the pilot operation set up under the INTERREG Caribbean framework programme could be replicated in other INTERREG transnational programmes.

– In order to support mobility and exchanges, representatives of the ORs have expressed their desire to implement the "Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs" programme in neighbouring ACP countries.

7.3. Session theme 3a: digital accessibility: Philippe BAUDOUIN. Summary of the panel.

Interactive debate based on contributions from the following panellists:

Ms. Lucilla SIOLI – Head of Unit F.4-DG CNECT – European Commission

Mr. Fabio PITTALUGA, Senior Social Development Specialist, Sustainable Development Department – The potential of tech-entrepreneurship and creative industries in Jamaica and the Caribbean

Mr. Germain GULTZHOFF, Associate Director Verso – an e-health project aimed at coordinating care pathways

Mr. Didier ZELLER, Director of Strategy and Development at SAS Marlink

7.3.1. Shared findings

The situation of the ORs is mixed. The deployment of mobile infrastructure continues to meet the high demand of users with the opening of 4G networks. Fixed THD infrastructures are being progressively deployed.

The issue of connectivity must meet several criteria such as:

- The adequacy of the cover in relation to location of the population
- The actual availability of the service and its cost
- User support
- The performance or the connection speed offered.

International connectivity, which is essentially dependent on undersea cables, is also a key point for the ORs. Even if the overall trend is to lower the cost of international bandwidth, the fact remains that this cost has a strong impact on the tariff structure of digital services for the ORs.

Due to the narrowness of their market, it is necessary to relax the rules on public funding used to support innovative companies. The outermost regions face the great challenge of developing skills, notably so that they can meet the new demands of employment. It is about offering training that is adapted to the new anticipated jobs and enabling as many people as possible to access the training. This issue is particularly sensitive for the ORs as it will help encourage young students to remain in the territory. Digital technology opens up prospective
opportunities for improving the training offered in the ORs. This was illustrated by the distance learning project that linked the three sites of the University of the Azores.

7.3.2. Mechanisms and tools to mobilise

Various forms of support and financial instruments are available at a European level. A European network of broadband support points also allows greater access to information on opportunities for support and funding. With regard to funding, beyond the ERDF, which is widely used by the ORs, the focus should be placed on new instruments such as the Connecting Europe Broadband Fund or even the Wi4EU programme.

The experience of the Jamaica projects, as presented by the speaker from the World Bank, has demonstrated how important it is to provide support and actions within the sector by means of partnerships and collective action.

7.3.3. Best practices

The initiatives undertaken in Jamaica have helped to build an ecosystem that is conducive to the development of digital activities. Based on the fact that young people in Jamaica have been severely affected by unemployment but are very creative, a series of projects has been launched in order to create opportunities for involvement in the digital economy markets. Starting with a type of Hackathon competition, this initiative is followed up with the establishment of an incubator backed by local and international investors. Simultaneously, support has also been given to the 3D and digital animation sector; raising the funds has enabled the creation of an international festival dedicated to animation and participation in the production of 3D films.

The example of the OiiS (Indian Ocean Health Innovation) in Réunion served to highlight how the implementation of an e-health platform allowed a response to be made to the specific need to monitor patients with chronic diseases. This platform provides the opportunity for different health professionals involved in the patient journey to coordinate their care efforts. The project is expected to be rolled out to other territories of the Indian Ocean (including Mayotte). This example shows how a digital project – namely the implementation of an e-health platform to improve the course of patient care – can lead to the creation of new jobs to support content creation, or even the management of relationships between healthcare professionals. 38 jobs have thus been created to date, with a number of them corresponding to new profiles.

7.4. Session theme 3b: Physical accessibility Pawel STELMASZCYK. Summary of the Panel.

Mr. Herald RUIJTERS, Director DG MOVE – Accessibility: a key factor for the ORs, reflections on their concerns and the strategies in place aimed at increasing accessibility.

Mr. Jean-Paul VIRAPOULLE, Vice President in charge of European Affairs - territorial discontinuity of the ORs

Mr. Eduardo JESUS, Regional Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Culture - the Autonomous Region of Madeira, avian accessibility.
7.4.1. The findings

The ORs are remote from the European continent, but they are a part of Europe in the same way as other regions.

European policy in the transport sector must be considered and defined as a geographical whole by integrating the outermost regions based on their own individual issues, such as accessibility difficulties, remoteness, the fact that eight of them are islands, and transport costs. Greater flexibility in the sector in terms of State aid granted to the transport sector has also been requested from the European Commission.

The ORs are positioned in close proximity to major international maritime routes; they must take advantage of this opportunity and have the ambition to become innovative areas of experimentation, especially in terms of clean shipping.

Accessibility by air is also fundamental to opening up the ORs and improving the mobility of the residents, including young people who are pursuing higher education. The price of air fares remains unaffordable for many of them.

Infrastructure management also generates high operating costs and given the small size of the ORs, it is difficult to achieve economies of scale in this area.

7.4.2. Mechanisms and tools to mobilise

The "advisory hub" centre of expertise of the European Investment Bank can provide specific technical advice on the financial preparation of records.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the cohesion fund can be asked to co-finance projects submitted by the outermost regions in order to link them to the Ten-T network.

7.4.3. Best practices

The project of the port of St André in Réunion encompasses a refuelling zone for green fuel ships, a centre for the use of deep waters as an energy source in conjunction with a waste treatment plant, and an operating and research laboratory in the field of cosmetics.

7.4.4. Courses of action identified

– Launch of a study that will be conducted by the Commission (DG MOVE and DG REGIO) to identify and evaluate the needs of the outermost regions and the actions to be taken in terms of physical connectivity.

– The ORs are invited to present specific projects to the Commission services in order to examine any possible co-financing options through the different mechanisms available to it.

– A long-term vision is required for the ORs and their integration into the RTE-T, as well as the funding of future projects beyond 2020.

– A detailed action plan concerning the motorways of the sea will be submitted shortly. The situation of the outermost regions will be examined in this context, as well as against the financing arrangements that can be made, especially those provided for by the Juncker Plan.
– A unique portal intended to facilitate the launch of eligible projects under the Juncker Plan will be soon available; this service should facilitate the emergence of projects submitted by the ORs.


Mr. Eric VON BRESKA, Director DG REGIO

Mr. Mihail DUMITRU, Deputy Director General DG AGRI

Mr. Serrão SANTOS, Member of the European Parliament, Member of the Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries of the European Parliament -

Ms Angeles GAYOSO RICO, Vocal Asesora - Dirección General de Fondos Comunitarios Ministerio de Hacienda y Función Pública – The role of cohesion policy in the outermost regions. The Spanish case.

Duarte RODRIGUES, Vice-President of the Board Cohesion and Development Agency – The funds in Portuguese Outermost Regions, Relevance, Results and Challenges

Mr. Mohamed SIDI, Vice President in charge of European Affairs and Regional Cooperation -

Mr. Vincent DUVILLE, Director of the Office of the President of the Territorial Collectivity of Martinique -

7.5.1. Findings and issues

For almost 30 years, in addition to national, public or private initiatives, European programmes have played a key role in supporting the development of the Outermost Regions (ORs).

A comparative analysis of the Competitiveness Index for these regions reveals overall positive development. The support of EU funds has contributed substantially to this, both in terms of investments – for the benefit of the territories and their residents – and in terms of specific measures designed to compensate for the additional costs generated by the characteristics and constraints specific to the outermost regions. Interventions that have focused on Portugal and Spain, Martinique and Mayotte, all agree that the intervention of the structural funds, including EAFRD, have enabled these areas to make progress in terms of living conditions, investments and job creation. The IEJ [initiative for youth employment] targets unemployment levels among young people (e.g. in Mayotte), and provides an alternative for young people leaving the educational system without a qualification (neither student, employee or trainee). They also stressed the importance of the POSEI scheme, financed by the EAGF and based on article 349, which supplies income aid to farmers and assists with the supply of agricultural products in the outermost regions.

3 NB. for regions where data is available, i.e. for Mayotte, Eurostat lacks the statistical data to award a ranking.
However, the challenges faced by the ORs remain significant, especially with regard to a level of youth unemployment greater than 50%. It is therefore important that the aid provided is as effective as possible.

The objective of the workshop was, on the one hand, to take stock of the support provided by the European programmes on the basis of specific projects, and, on the other hand, to discuss ideas for the future regarding the promotion of a sustainable and inclusive development of the ORs, all the while taking into account their specific challenges and opportunities.

7.5.2. Mechanisms and tools to mobilise

Stakeholders have marked their support for specific measures provided for under the regulations of the ESI funds in favour of the outermost regions, namely the specific allocation of compensation for cost overruns. They stressed, however, that they did not cover all of the additional costs generated by the extreme remoteness of the goods and services (transport, logistics, energy) and the fact that these were undertaken in the face of constraints affecting the economic and social integration of these territories, as compared to other regions of the EU.

Furthermore, stakeholders have stressed the importance of agriculture and the countryside in the ORs. The Union's support is important in this area as a result of the two pillars of the Common Agricultural Policy. These pillars complement each other and help contribute to the maintenance and development of agricultural activity in the rural areas of the ORs, thanks to the POSEI programmes and the rural development programmes (DR). These provide overall assistance of EUR 866 million/year (for the DR: average over the 2014-2020 period).

Panellists and participants expressed very high expectations on the topic of simplification when faced with the complexity of the implementation of the FESI, or even specific issues such as the relevance of the support instrument with regard to fishing, the EMFF compared to what is in place for agriculture, the specific POSEI instrument with a request backed by some representatives, including that of the European Parliament, for the introduction of a specific fisheries instrument.

Similar positions were raised with regard to competition policy, including the complexity of the existing rules on State aid in the maritime domain, the fishing sector and in agriculture (Mayotte).

7.5.3. Best practices

Stakeholders stressed good awareness of their specific challenges and their strengths within the framework of European programmes to encourage their endogenous development and more specifically:

• their geostrategic position and their maritime dimension:

(Examples of projects: the Oceanic Research Centre in the Azores or offshore aquaculture projects in Madeira):

• the tourist potential based on the valuable natural and cultural heritage. The importance of tourism in regional economies and several awards over the years, tourism:

(Example of a project: terminals for cruises to Funchal and Ponta Delgada);
• the role of EU strategy regarding climate change – more exposure to serious phenomena, but there are also real laboratories for pilot projects on mitigation and adaptation measures:

(For example: the project for the production of geothermal energy in the Azores and protecting the population against flood risk in Madeira);

• the archipelagic configuration (double insularity) - the extra cost and challenges of transport in the islands and the provision of services of general interest across the entire territory (the challenge facing the Azores in connecting the islands and their 300 000 inhabitants, nine of which are larger than 600 km²);

• the lack of critical mass for some economic, financial, scientific or civil protection sectors with regard to process and projects (for example, the need to promote the cooperation of the European Union in R&D projects);

• the impact of the economic and social crisis, difficulties in finding another development path for small closed economies;

• the need to maintain the traditional production process in a globalised world (their externalities in terms of the environment, ecosystems, local economies and local living conditions).

Similar positions were raised with regard to competition policy, including the complexity of the existing rules on State aid in the maritime domain, the fishing sector and in agriculture (Mayotte).

7.5.4. Courses of action identified

Regarding the future, the exchanges resulted in interesting and structured observations in comparison with the debate currently led by the Commission that deals with, on the one hand, the policy in general, and, on the other hand, the specific characteristics of the outermost regions.

With regard to the policy in general, the key points have been put forward:

- How not to distort the territorial approach in respect to the achievement of a common goal set at European level.

- How to reconcile development as a subject of excellence and competitiveness in relation to the objective of economic, social and territorial cohesion

- How to ensure the simplification of procedures – real, true – while keeping the focus on results with a view to identifying and subsequently demonstrating a maximum added value of these funds.

- To be able to prove and demonstrate it. The example of the EDF regulations has been mentioned.

Proposal tracks and courses of action have supported these guidelines:
The need for a substantial specific OR allocation to cover the factors referred to in Article 349 of the TFEU

The pursual of the POSEI with good coordination between the POSEI and the rural development programmes. However, there remains the need for a regionalisation of the POSEI and better distribution of aid by land, as well as a major simplification of procedures considered to be too complex for the EAFRD, and greater leeway on a local level.

The simplification of the existing rules in terms of State aid in the maritime, fishing and agriculture (Mayotte) sectors and the best way to coordinate them with the FESI programmes. The start of the programmes should be concomitant with the adoption of areas of State aid; the decision of the Commission to adopt the programmes should also be a decision that approves aid schemes.

The need to avoid an overlap of programmes and to be able to benefit from advances, such as in the case of the Erasmus programme.

Position the ORs within a context of legal stability that is compatible with their economic development; post-2020 ORs to have growing recognition of their specific characteristics. Stability of financial support, which should not vary in accordance with GDP.

Easier access for ORs to European horizontal programmes (e.g.: Erasmus+) and information on the Commission’s services regarding proposals for the outermost regions that are not successful, programmes such as COSME). Promote inter-OR exchanges via horizontal programmes.

8. Closing remarks

Mr. Karmenu VELLA, European Commissioner of the Environment, Maritime and Fisheries.

The ORs are regions that are advanced in terms of the blue and green economy.

Elements that have been considered, such as disabilities, insularity, a difficult climate... have all be transformed into benefits and advantages.

The post-2020 approach is respectful of the environment in the transport sector and supports actions aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change, improving the energy efficiency of ships, promoting the reduction of emissions of pollutants or greenhouse gases, and contributing to the better development of sustainable tourism, particularly within the context of cruise tourism.

A study on blue growth will be presented soon and will propose funding measures for which the outermost regions are eligible.

Moreover, it is noted that, since 2010, the BEST initiative has given rise to 60 projects to raise awareness of issues relating to environmental preservation.

In addition, in the same space of time, the European structural funds have supported 135 projects in the field of aquaculture.

The ORs are assured of the full attention of the European Commission, which has reaffirmed its commitment to blue, sustainable growth.
9. CONCLUSION

The Fourth Forum of the Outermost Regions provided support to the ORs in terms of their positioning within the European Union.

The number and quality of the participants demonstrated the importance of these regions to the international influence of Europe.

Their status, thus acting as a guarantee of their recognition and awareness of their specific characteristics, has been strengthened by the decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union dated December 15, 2015.

The work undertaken over these two days and the Memorandum presented to President Juncker by the President of the Conference of Presidents of the Outermost Regions will provide guidelines to be followed as part of the new strategy of the European Union in favour of the outermost regions beyond 2020.

The approach will be fulfilled through the adoption of a Communication from the European Commission in favour of the outermost regions, which will be adopted next autumn.

10. WEBSITE

The forum can be viewed on the following websites:


11. APPENDICES