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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION**

**The outermost regions: an asset for Europe**

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## The outermost regions: an asset for Europe

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Globalisation, climate change, demographic trends and migratory flows, and the sustainable management of natural resources such as marine resources and agricultural products are just some of the challenges facing Europe as a whole.

The European Commission, aware that the outermost regions (OR) are particularly vulnerable and exposed to these challenges and in order to gather input for its reflections on the development of the European strategy for these regions, launched a wide-ranging consultation<sup>1</sup> in September 2007 with the European institutions, the Member States, the outermost regions, socio-professional groups, research centres and universities, and organised an interinstitutional and partnership conference on 14 and 15 May 2008 in Brussels.

The numerous contributions received show that the respondents are keen to explore and make the most of the EU's outermost regions, as well as to see the emergence of a renewed strategy marking a change of paradigm – the OR as “regions of opportunity”, rich in potential for development – while ensuring that their specific characteristics are taken into account.

Drawing on all of these reflections, this Communication:

- responds to the call on the Commission from the Heads of State and Government to present the results of the public consultation and proposals on the subject (Conclusions of the European Council, December 2007, para. 59);
- proposes a change of approach for the development of the strategy, opening the way for the new paradigm, and makes recommendations to ensure optimal use of the instruments and possibilities available in the current financial framework (2007-2013).

### 2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUROPEAN STRATEGY FOR THE OR

Since 1999, the EU has recognised that the geographical and economic realities of the OR are different from those of the other regions of Europe: remoteness, insularity, small size, difficult topography and climate, and economic dependence on a small number of products (see Article 299(2) of the EC Treaty). These realities constitute disadvantages for their sustainable and harmonious development and the EU, through various programmes and measures, aims to minimise these as far as possible in order to promote the economic and social convergence of these regions<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Consultation launched by the Commission communication "Strategy for the Outermost Regions: Achievements and Future Prospects" COM(2007)507 final.

<sup>2</sup> Since the latest EU enlargements, the OR as a whole are no longer part of the group of poorest regions. However, relative to the Community average in 2005 (EU-27=100), French Guiana (GDP per capita 50.5), Réunion (GDP per capita 61.6) but also the Azores (GDP per capita 66.7) and, to a lesser extent,

In 2004, the EU defined a strategy based on an integrated approach with three main strands: accessibility and reduction of the effects of the other constraints, competitiveness and regional integration. This approach, given the permanent nature of the disadvantages facing the OR, remains valid but will require further development in order to rise to the new challenges.

In September 2007<sup>3</sup> the Commission therefore recognised the need: "to continue the effort to adapt Community policies and for specific support whenever necessary". The adoption, since 2007, of new programmes and measures in support of the OR is testimony to the continued awareness of the specificities of the OR, and should enable them to make clear progress in the context of the three strands of the strategy.

#### *Reducing the accessibility deficit*

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) operational programmes for the period 2007-2013 continue the effort to reduce the accessibility problems by investing in transport and telecommunications infrastructures and by supporting operating expenditure through the new specific allocation to offset additional costs. In total, almost €1 710 million from the ERDF (in other words, 36% of the total ERDF budget allocated to the OR) will be invested in improving the accessibility of these regions.

The Commission has also adopted a scheme of support for freight in the French overseas departments<sup>4</sup> and aid of a social nature for air transport (French Guiana<sup>5</sup> and Madeira, similar to that granted in the past for Guadeloupe, Martinique and Réunion).

#### *Increasing competitiveness*

In accordance with the guidelines resulting from the implementation of the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies, the outermost regions have taken up the challenge of economic competitiveness of their territories by devising a development strategy for the period 2007-2013 that draws on their home-grown potential. In the framework of the ERDF and European Social Fund (ESF) operational programmes, this has translated into a high concentration of expenditure in areas related to the Lisbon strategy and emphasis on developing regional strategies for innovation or to enhance the development of human potential in the field of research and innovation.

The rural development programmes for the period 2007-2013 also improve the competitiveness of the OR by concentrating on maintaining productivity in the agricultural sector, supporting sectors undergoing restructuring, continuing training, the development of high-quality products and the preservation of the environment.

In the agricultural sphere, the draft Regulation for a "health check"<sup>6</sup> maintains the exemptions made for the OR in terms of decoupling and modulation of direct payments. It also provides

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Guadeloupe (GDP per capita 70.6) and Martinique (GDP per capita 75.6) remain among the least prosperous regions of the 27 EU countries. The Canary Islands (GDP per capita 93.7) and Madeira (GDP per capita 94.9) are coming close to the Community average.

<sup>3</sup> Commission communication "Strategy for the Outermost Regions: Achievements and Future Prospects" COM(2007)507 final, 12 September 2007.

<sup>4</sup> State Aid N199/2007 concerning support for freight in the French overseas departments.

<sup>5</sup> State Aid N912/2006 concerning individual aid measures of a social nature for internal air transport in French Guiana and air transport in the autonomous region of Madeira.

<sup>6</sup> COM(2008)306 final, 20 May 2008.

for the transfer of €24.46 million in direct payments to the POSEI scheme from the 2010 financial year onwards.

Furthermore, in the context of the reform of the common organisation of the market in wine, the Commission has taken account of the calls from the OR concerning the maintenance of the current arrangements for vineyard restructuring and exemption from the grubbing-up scheme. As far as distillation and use of concentrated grape must is concerned, the status quo will be maintained, with one change provided for in Regulation (EC) No 247/2006.

In the fisheries sector, the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) helps fishing communities to diversify their economy, remain competitive on the fresh fish market by developing products with high added value and increase the rate of supply to local markets from aquaculture.

In October 2007 the Commission set out its vision for a new integrated maritime policy for the European Union<sup>7</sup>, which aims to meet the specific needs of the OR more effectively while strengthening synergies and consistency between sectoral policies.

Finally, concerning State aid, a number of provisions are aimed in particular at promoting productive investment, job creation or vocational training, while taking account of the specific disadvantages affecting the OR<sup>8</sup>. The different special fiscal and customs arrangements<sup>9</sup> adopted in favour of the OR will make it possible to continue to provide the necessary support to the competitiveness of the economies of these regions, particularly for certain sectors or types of products.

#### *Strengthening regional integration*

The territorial cooperation programmes for the period 2007-2013, jointly financed by the ERDF, provide opportunities for the development of the action plan for the wider neighbourhood. By way of example, the "Macaronesia"<sup>10</sup> (MAC) programme allocates almost one-third of its ERDF budget to cooperation with third countries. Similarly, in the context of the national indicative programmes of the tenth EDF, Mauritania, Senegal and Cape Verde have allocated – or are likely to allocate – financial resources to cooperation with the OR. In addition, the Canary Islands are currently developing a programme of cross-border cooperation with Morocco, jointly financed by the Wider Neighbourhood Instrument (IGV) and the ERDF.

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<sup>7</sup> Commission communication "An integrated maritime policy for the EU" COM(2007)575 final, Blue Book, SEC(2007) 12/78/2 action plan.

<sup>8</sup> For example, State Aid 22/2008 concerning aid measures in the context of the AIEM for the Canary Islands. Decision 2008/417/EC of 3 June 2008 on the excise duties applicable to beer brewed in Madeira. State Aid N421/2006, authorisation for a State aid measure in the form of a lower tax rate for companies registered in Madeira's free zone.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Council Decision 2008/439/EC of 9 June 2008 on amendments to dock dues for new products from French Guiana. Council Regulation (EC) No 645/2008 of 8 July 2008 opening and providing for the administration of autonomous Community tariff quotas on imports of certain fishery products into the Canary Islands.

<sup>10</sup> The Macaronesia programme is the name of the transnational territorial cooperation area encompassing the Canary Islands, Madeira and the Azores.

Finally, the OR involved in the Macaronesia programme play an essential role in the implementation of the special partnership between the EU and Cape Verde<sup>11</sup>.

The specific provisions in favour of the OR included in the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) – facilitation of cooperation with the ACP countries, safeguard and exclusion clauses for the local sugar and banana markets – give these regions the chance to increase their regional integration, while taking account of the vulnerability of their markets.

### **3. THE PUBLIC DEBATE**

The public debate on the future of the European strategy for the outermost regions, which took place between September 2007 and May 2008, marks an important stage in the development of dialogue and partnership between the European Union, the Member States and the outermost regions.

The numerous contributions received and the participatory mechanisms put in place at regional and local level reflect the high levels of commitment and interest among all of the parties concerned.

Similarly, the interinstitutional and partnership conference held on 14 and 15 May 2008 in Brussels brought together nearly 300 participants, who were able to express and exchange their points of view concerning the challenges and realities facing Europe's outermost regions.

Beyond the detailed analysis of the results of this consultation<sup>12</sup> several key lessons emerged from this exercise:

#### *Implementation of the 2004 strategy assessed as satisfactory overall*

- Unanimous recognition of the usefulness of an integrated European strategy for the outermost regions and validation of the three priority strands defined in 2004: accessibility, competitiveness and regional integration. Need for advancement in the action taken specifically with a view to reducing the accessibility deficit of the OR and enhancing their regional integration.
- Recognition of the significant advances recorded in recent years thanks to the implementation of specific measures, particularly under the cohesion, agriculture, research and competition policies.

#### *Suitability of the subject areas proposed by the 2007 communication*

- Confirmation of the relevance of the four themes proposed by the communication issued in September 2007<sup>13</sup>, which sought to add to the three priority areas set out in the strategy. These themes present major challenges for the outermost regions, in terms not only of the problems which need to be overcome (the high cost of coping with the effects of climate

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<sup>11</sup> Communication from the Commission of 24 October 2007 on the future of relations between the European Union and the Republic of Cape Verde, COM(2007) 641 final.

<sup>12</sup> All of the contributions, and a summary of the conclusions of the public consultation process, are available on the site [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/consultation/rup/contri\\_fr.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/consultation/rup/contri_fr.htm).

<sup>13</sup> Climate change, demographic change and migratory flows, agriculture and maritime policy.

change, the impact of the population boom or of the ageing population, the effects of the increase in illegal immigration) but also of the opportunities for development which need to be grasped (the challenge of agricultural diversification, the benefits to be gained from exploiting maritime potential).

*Reaffirmation of constraints and of the need to capitalise on the strengths of the outermost regions*

- Reaffirmation of the permanent disadvantages affecting the OR and call for consolidation of existing instruments in order to offset them.
- Readiness to make full use of the comparative assets and advantages enjoyed by these regions compared to the European Union and neighbouring third countries (unique geostrategic position, specific potential in terms of renewable energies, observation and monitoring of the effects of climate change and of biodiversity). These characteristics make the outermost regions an ideal location in which to conduct pilot projects with high added value for the European Union.

*Systematisation of impact assessments and quest for better synergy and consistency between Community policies for the outermost regions*

- Need for systematisation of the use of impact assessments when implementing new Community legislation on the environment, agriculture or fisheries, and when negotiating international trade agreements with a direct impact on the economies of the OR.
- Need to improve consistency between the various Community policies and to ensure that realities on the ground are better recognised and taken into account.

*Improvements to knowledge and statistical data about certain phenomena*

- Need for statistics that are reliable, comprehensive and tailored to the specific context of the OR in order to formulate, implement and properly assess the impact of public policies. Numerous studies are thus proposed, focusing on: population movements and demographic trends, the impact of migration on the economic and social cohesion of the outermost regions, the effects of climate change on the economy of these regions, the impact of trade liberalisation on agriculture.

All of these contributions provided input for the Commission's reflections in connection with this communication and will continue to enhance the development and implementation of Community policies with an impact on the OR.

#### **4. TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM: MAKING THE MOST OF THE UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OR**

In the age of globalisation and of research to improve European competitiveness, there is a need to support the development of growth sectors where the OR have the potential for specialisation and a strong comparative edge. These sectors also constitute fertile ground for the development of cutting-edge initiatives and pilot projects of significant interest for Europe. This new paradigm, centred on making the most of the assets of the OR as a springboard for economic development, must lead to a renewal of the strategy focussing, in particular, on sectors with high added value, such as agri-food, biodiversity, renewable

energies, astrophysics, aerospace science, oceanography, vulcanology or seismology, and the important role of the OR as outposts of the European Union in the world.

#### **4.1. Outposts of the European Union in the world**

The OR, surrounded by geopolitical and geographic realities that are different from those of the continental European Union, represent the vanguard of the EU's position vis-à-vis other major economic blocs. They thus confer a special dimension on the Union's external activities and participate in the development of a true wider neighbourhood policy through their geographical, cultural and historical links with other countries and peoples, particularly in Africa and the Americas.

The OR bring a considerable international maritime dimension to the European Union, resulting in enhanced legitimacy for its policy of sustainable co-development of the oceans in three areas in particular: Macaronesia, the Caribbean and the south-western Indian Ocean.

Located on shipping routes or straits, the OR occupy an important position for trade. They also play a role in maritime governance for the monitoring of coastal waters (for instance, the fight against illegal fishing, piracy or drug trafficking) or in improving the security of transport (for instance, the management of oil transport in the Caribbean).

Moreover, the OR border on regions faced with developmental challenges, with which the EU cooperates in the areas of combating poverty, sustainable development, managing migratory flows and regional security. The OR can thus act as privileged partners with their neighbouring third countries, specifically in projects to enhance administrative capacities, training, education and health, creation of SMEs, agriculture, fisheries and prevention of natural hazards.

The Atlantic OR are called upon to play a strategic role in the special partnership recently concluded between the EU<sup>14</sup> and Cape Verde. Cooperation measures will be developed in the priority areas identified in the partnership action plan, such as the fight against illegal trafficking (drugs, clandestine immigration), and police cooperation.

#### **4.2. Ideal location for experimentation to combat the effects of climate change**

The geomorphologic characteristics and geographical location of the OR are assets of fundamental importance for scientific research, particularly the study and monitoring of phenomena linked to the effects of climate change.

The prevention of the natural hazards to which the OR are particularly exposed is an especially valuable line of research. The OR are in a position to serve as platforms for technological and scientific cooperation through monitoring and observation of natural hazards in their respective areas.

The OR face a dual challenge where energy is concerned: reducing their dependency on fossil energies and grasping the opportunities presented by their natural environment to develop practices and know-how that can be exported and reproduced. Pilot projects under way or in preparation are developing innovative and original solutions in which renewable energies play

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<sup>14</sup> Communication from the Commission of 24 October 2007 on the future of relations between the European Union and the Republic of Cape Verde, COM(2007) 641 final.



a central role. As well as offering environmental and economic benefits, these constitute a veritable showcase of European knowhow.

The NRJRUP project aims to promote exchanges of best practice and transfer of knowhow between the OR, and to define a policy for the development of renewable energies starting from the use of maritime resources.

In Réunion, the GERRI project aims at achieving energy self-sufficiency for the island by 2030.

The multi-purpose power station ("*Aproveitamento de fins múltiplos dos Socorridos*") in Madeira makes a substantial contribution to the island's electricity production by reducing the hydroelectric system's dependence on seasonal constraints.

In the area of health, climatic upheavals are today increasing the risk of and vulnerability to tropical diseases. The emergence of new diseases calls for the establishment of new advanced centres for microbiological research and monitoring in areas where disease is endemic, to enable rapid and reliable diagnosis of pathogens and the assessment of the risks of their emergence and spread. The OR already have and are in a position to further develop research infrastructures that may be used to enhance health protection in their region as a whole as well as in continental Europe.

Established as a result of the 2007 chikungunya epidemic, the Centre de Recherche et de Veille sur les Maladies Emergentes dans l'Océan Indien (CRVOI, Centre for Research and Monitoring of Emerging Diseases in the Indian Ocean) aims to develop multi-disciplinary research in the field of emerging infectious diseases, particularly those with the potential to develop into epidemics, with an eye to the health priorities in the Indian Ocean Region.

#### **4.3. Remarkable biodiversity and wealth of marine ecosystems**

Where biodiversity is concerned the OR are home to an extraordinary wealth of varieties, generally more numerous than those of all of continental Europe. This wealth forms the foundation of economic activities such as fishing and tourism, and supports numerous ecological services such as water purification, the renewal of fisheries resources, protection of soils against erosion or protection of coasts from natural disasters and climate change. This resource represents a potential for discoveries and innovations in the areas of pharmaceutical or agronomic research.

The OR also have abundant and relatively well-preserved fishery resources: the seabed is a veritable living laboratory of biodiversity and makes it possible to establish a policy of sustainable fisheries development.

The OR are also an ideal location for research into the development of biotechnologies, particularly those involving the exploitation of specific marine resources such as deep-sea hydrothermal springs or tropical ecosystems.

The Oceanography and Fisheries Department of the University of the Azores has created a centre of excellence to study and analyse oceanic resources. One of the projects conducted aims to improve knowledge of the ocean depths and develop technologies to facilitate access to deep waters.

#### 4.4. Scientific portals for their geographical areas

By developing cutting-edge information and communication technologies on their territories, the OR are creating a position for themselves as platforms for the dissemination of technologies and veritable scientific portals in their respective environments.

The SEAS<sup>15</sup> project in French Guiana aims to gather data from satellite observation of the Amazonian and Caribbean environment. Unique in Europe and in South America, this technological platform supplies the data needed to monitor resources and manage the Amazon basin (7 million km<sup>2</sup>) and contributes to the Global Monitoring Environment and Security initiative.

Since 2005, Guadeloupe has set up a network of high-speed undersea digital cables ("Global Cable Network") running from Puerto Rico and serving 14 islands in the Eastern Caribbean as far as Trinidad and Tobago. This major infrastructure, spread over 2 100 km, has considerably increased the capacity available to telecommunications operators and brought about very competitive rates for users.

Offering excellent visibility of celestial objects to astronomers, the Canary Islands Astrophysics Centre is a research infrastructure renowned at international level, housing the most advanced telescopes and astrophysical installations in the European Union. Once the Great Canary Telescope (GCT), the only one of its kind in the world, is put into service it will enable European astrophysics researchers to participate in projects of a highly technological nature.

#### 4.5. High-quality agricultural produce

The originality and quality of the agricultural produce grown in the OR deserve wider recognition. Indeed, the economic development of the OR is also supported by exports of products that are much in demand for their quality and unique characteristics: for instance, AOC rum from Martinique, the Victoria pineapple from Réunion or the Caribbean melon, Madeira wine, cheese and tea from the Azores, AOC wines and cheeses from the Canary Islands or flowers and ornamental plants from all of the OR.

The Martinique Agriculture and Environment Research Centre (*Pôle de Recherche Agro-environnementale de la Martinique, PRAM*) is working to develop diversified and sustainable agriculture as well as new niche markets by focussing in particular on exploiting little-used local fruit varieties, making genetic improvements to varieties and establishing sustainable production systems.

As all of the above examples demonstrate, the OR are already using innovative and original methods to make the most of their assets. This know-how must be enhanced to enable them to make their economies more dynamic and to play a new role within the European Union.

### 5. PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE

Without anticipating the development of the Union's future general policy framework, particularly the reflection on the financial outlook beyond 2013, and with a view to fleshing

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<sup>15</sup> French Guiana SEAS project: Satellite-Assisted Surveillance of the Amazonian Environment.

out the new paradigm, the Commission proposes to ensure that better use is made of the existing Community instruments, and puts forward a series of measures that could be implemented in the current budgetary framework.

### **5.1. Use of existing Community instruments**

In budgetary terms, the OR will receive €7.8 billion in Community investment over the period 2007-2013 (ERDF, ESF, EAFRD, EFF, POSEI). Full advantage must be taken of all of these instruments and of the flexibility allowed under the regulations to incorporate new priorities, for instance, during the mid-term strategic reflections on the national reports for 2009 and the Commission report in 2010.

The Commission will continue to work with the EIB and the EIF to facilitate the implementation of the JEREMIE and JESSICA initiatives in these regions.

The OR will also be able to become involved in the “Regions for Economic Change” initiative and its “fast-track” element implemented under the interregional strand of the territorial cooperation objective and the sustainable urban development programme (Urbact II). Encouraging the emergence of networks of regional players and pilot projects that may eventually be incorporated into the convergence and competitiveness programmes, this initiative includes priority themes of particular relevance for the OR, such as "enhancing coastal areas" and "reaping the benefits of the seas and oceans".

In the field of education and training, the Commission encourages the development of new skills and know-how that will be of crucial importance to enable individuals to face up to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This adaptation of human capital will have to be based in particular on increased participation in university exchange programmes, the development of key skills through lifelong learning<sup>16</sup> and increased cooperation between European training and education systems.

Finally, the OR must be placed in a position to grasp the opportunities offered within the existing Community programmes in the areas of research, transport, energy, innovation, information and communication technologies, education or culture through active participation in the corresponding calls for proposals.

### **5.2. Rising to the new challenges, deepening knowledge, strengthening partnership**

More specifically, in view of the themes analysed in the course of the public debate, the Commission would propose the following measures:

#### *(a) Climate change*

- Launching a study of the economic impact of adaptation to climate change in coastal areas. This study will be carried out for the European Union as a whole but will include a specific analysis of the OR. It should encourage the systematic exchange of good practices concerning the cost and planning of adaptation in coastal regions.
- Encouraging the establishment of an integrated policy for the management of coastal risks (flooding, coastline erosion, reducing the vulnerability of people and

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<sup>16</sup> Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, OJ L 394, 30.12.2006.

property at risk) and a monitoring and warning system with an eye to safety and the disaster and emergency services.

- Drawing up a voluntary nature conservation plan based on the Natura 2000 experience.
- Developing and implementing measures to control invasive species.
- Recognising the vulnerability of the outermost regions in the context of the White Paper on adaptation to the effects of climate change.

(b) *Demographic trends and migratory flows*

- Launching an impact study to obtain a better overview of the consequences – positive and otherwise – of both migration and demographic trends on the territory, the labour market, public services, education and health in the OR. This should enable a “migration balance sheet” to be drawn up for each region. During the mid-term evaluation of the recent general programme "Solidarity and the Management of Migration Flows 2007-2013", the Commission will determine whether further developments are necessary, including the need for and feasibility of setting up a “European Fund for adjustment to migration”.
- Concerning demographics, the Commission would call on the Member States and the regional authorities of the OR to continue and, where necessary, increase their analytical work with a view to taking the demographic change factor into consideration when defining policies, particularly in the areas of education, training and employment, as well as during the Structural Fund programming process. It also calls on the National Statistical Institutes to continue their cooperation with EUROSTAT.

(c) *Agriculture*

- Continue to encourage the use of all of the possibilities offered by the POSEI scheme as regards structuring and distribution of the budget allocated to each OR, the number of productions to be supported, and monitoring of environmental problems linked to specific forms of pollution.
- Encouraging the use of different forms of start-up and investment assistance for young farmers, which can be modulated within the rural development programme in question to take account of specific regional requirements.
- Grasping all the opportunities offered by the Community product promotion programmes<sup>17</sup> and including more products in these programmes will certainly contribute to increasing the number of trade outlets and building up the reputation of high-performance agricultural and agri-food sectors.

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<sup>17</sup> Programme to promote the graphic symbol of the OR (Council Regulation 247/2006) and Annex I of Commission Regulation 501/2008 – indicative annual budget: €1 million, as well as product promotion measures laid down in the POSEI arrangements.

(d) *Maritime policy*

- Adapting the European Integrated Maritime Policy and the various sectoral actions provided for in its action plan to the specific characteristics of the OR.
- Increasing knowledge of maritime affairs and the marine environment and the value of the services provided by marine ecosystems in the OR by means of a specific analysis in the context of the maritime socio-economic data project led by EUROSTAT and the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODNet). The information obtained will be used for a comprehensive analysis of the OR in the "Sea Atlas" to be published in 2009 by the Commission.
- Creating networks dedicated to research and enhancing the role of the OR as ideal observatories for the marine environment for Europe in the context of the new Marine and Maritime Research Strategy<sup>18</sup>. Providing, in the context of the 7<sup>th</sup> RTD Framework Programme, support for research into knowledge, preservation and management of marine ecosystems.
- Encouraging the OR to play a strategic role in maritime governance and monitoring in their respective regions, specifically by developing their own integrated regional maritime policies and maritime spatial plans and through joint activities with third countries in the context of Community regional cooperation programmes or the regional fisheries monitoring plan in the south-western Indian Ocean.
- Encouraging maritime links between the OR and neighbouring third countries with a view to strengthening economic and cultural exchanges, by modifying – no later than their next revision – the current Community guidelines on State aid for sea transport in order to authorise start-up assistance for these connections. Alternatively, the OR can make use of public service contracts for these links, verifying the criteria of the "Altmark" case-law<sup>19</sup>.

(e) *Strengthening partnership*

- When new Community legislation is being adopted, the analysis of its consequences for the OR must be intensified in order to ensure consistency. In this regard the work of the Commission's Interdepartmental OR group could, when needed, be accompanied by ad hoc task forces to deal with specific problems.
- Launching a socio-economic study of growth factors in the OR that would emphasise growth sectors, such as those identified in this communication, would also identify the principal constraints on their development and make it possible to address them.
- Making sure that discussions of the development of the strategy for the OR – as well as full participation by the OR themselves – are included in ongoing

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<sup>18</sup> COM (2008)534 "A European Strategy for Marine and Maritime Research. A coherent European Research Area framework in support of a sustainable use of oceans and seas".

<sup>19</sup> Court of Justice ruling – OJ C 226/1, 20.09.2003.

mechanisms and actions such as: the Green Paper on territorial cohesion; the future of cohesion policy beyond 2013; the reform of the Union's budget; regional integration for the development of the ACP countries; the Green Paper on the future of relations between the EU and the overseas territories and countries, or the development of European maritime policy.

- The OR must be called upon to take a constructive role in the process of implementing and finalising the EPAs. They should in particular grasp the opportunities offered by the enhancement of regional cooperation for trade in goods and services as well as in other areas such as services, intellectual property and public procurement. It is in these areas in particular, where the OR have a comparative edge, that real complementarity may be developed between the economies of these regions and those of the ACP countries. In this regard, it is important to support measures geared towards increasing the capacity of the OR to keep pace with both the trade flows in which they are involved and the EU's trade policy.
- Organising, together with the OR, information sessions to provide a better explanation of Community instruments and policies (7<sup>th</sup> RTD Framework Programme, dissemination of cooperation possibilities developed by the EDF and the ERDF, etc).
- Organising, together with the Member States and the OR, a forum for "outermost Europe" that would take place every two years (networking of best practices, rewards for initiatives developing growth sectors, campaigns to raise awareness of the issues facing the OR, etc.).

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this Communication the Commission is following up the call made by the European Council of December 2007, taking account of the views expressed by the parties during the public consultation.

In view of the challenges currently facing the world – energy crisis, food crisis, climate change, demographic pressure and migratory flows, urgent need for better management of the oceans and seas – full use must be made of the contribution from the OR. These regions are veritable "ideas laboratories" where all of these challenges and phenomena can be identified, examined and modelled. Their experience will be important for their geographical surroundings and for the rest of the territory of the Union.

This potential brings with it a new paradigm that will have to be exploited in the future. This must not, however, lead to any let-up in the surveillance of the development of European sectoral policies, in the context of which all of the existing possibilities must be used.

The new approach must give rise to new projects that result in added value and sustainable development and that will lead, in the longer term, to a renewed European strategy in favour of the OR.