



MINUTES

CPMR POLITICAL BUREAU

16 June 2022, Helsingborg (Skåne, Sweden)

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- **Sweden** Jesper **SKALBERG KARLSSON**, Vice chairman of the regional board, Region Gotland

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- **Balkan and Black Sea Commission**

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- **Denmark** Tage **LEEGAARD**, Councillor, Region Nordjylland
- **Finland** Talvikki **JORI**, Vice-Member of the Board, Region of Southwest Finland
- **Malta** John **BORG**, Permanent Secretary, Ministry for Gozo
- **Sweden** Anna **JÄHNKE**, Representative of Region Skåne & Chairman of the Regional Development Board

Alternate representatives of Presidents of Commissions

- **Baltic Sea Commission**

Tomas **MÖRTSELL**, Vice-President, Committee for Regional Development, Region Västerbotten (Sweden)

- **Intermediterranean Commission**

Montserrat **RIBA CUNILL**, Delegate of the Catalan Government to Nordic and Baltic States

Host Region

Lennart **PETTERSSON**, First Deputy President of the Regional Council, Region Skåne
Ewa **PIHL KRABBE**, Second Deputy President of the Regional Council, Region Skåne
Pontus **LINDBERG**, Member of the Regional Council, Region Skåne

Guests / Speakers

- **European Commission**

Eero **AILIO**, Special Advisor, Directorate-General for Energy

- **European Parliament**

Erik **BERGKVIST**, Member of the TRAN Committee
Irène **TOLLERET**, Member of the REGI Committee
Sandra **HULT**, Parliamentary Assistant to MEP Bergkvist
Elin **NEJNE**, Special assistant to MEP Bergkvist



- **Committee of the Regions**

Bert **KUBY**, Head of Unit, CIVEX Commission

Regional Politicians

Mihaita-Constantin **BESTEÄ**, Vice-President, Calarasi County Council (RO)

Valentin-Dumitru **DECULESCU**, Councillor, Calarasi County Council (RO)

Jenel **SERBAN**, Councillor, Calarasi County Council (RO)

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Claire **LE TERTRE**, Head of the European and International Unit, Brittany Region (FR)

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Philip Mario **MIFSUD**, Assistant Director, Ministry for Gozo (MT)

Ramon **MONEDERO PUJOL**, Cabinet member, Region of Murcia (ES)

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Carin **PETERS**, Senior strategist, Region Skåne (SE)

Jacqueline **SPIJIBROEK**, EU Representative, Province of Zuid-Holland (NL)

Wim **STOOKER**, EU Representative, Province of Noord-Holland (NL)

Adrian **ZITELLI FERRARI**, Director General of European Union Affairs, Region of Murcia (ES)

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Eleni **MARIANOU**, Secretary General

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Robin **STENSTRÖM**, Regional Development Officer, Region Västra Götaland



SESSION 1 - OPENING SESSION

Anna Jähnke (Region Skåne), warmly welcomed CPMR colleagues to Skåne region and the city of Helsingborg. She briefly described the region, southernmost region in Sweden, the third most populated in Sweden with 1.4 million inhabitants. A region where European cooperation is very important, due to its particular geographical location, bordering with Denmark and a gateway to Europe. Skåne is part of the greater Copenhagen region, a highly connected region with rail, road and waterway, and it has the biggest airport in the region – Copenhagen – allowing for connections with the East and international transit. In this respect, Ms Jähnke mentioned that there is still work to do reach the best regional perspective of the TEN-T.

Regarding Smart Specialisation Strategies, and the event held the day before by Skåne Region and the CPMR in cooperation with DG MARE, she mentioned the town of Lund that has two big research centres with state-of-the-art technology. The city of Lund will be carbon neutral in the near future. Science, innovation, climate and concretely avoiding plastic in pharmaceutical products is the objective. She mentioned the importance of joining forces to respond to current challenges.

Ms Jähnke highlighted that Helsingborg is an innovative city, a frontrunner in green tech and smart solutions, and it is currently hosting the City Expo H22, focusing on innovative solutions to increase the quality of life of inhabitants.

Regarding the war in Ukraine, Ms Jähnke shared her thoughts on the brutal attack, happening only 2 hours away. This, she said, makes even more important the need to connect better with our neighbours around the Baltic and around Europe as a whole.

President Cees Loggen opened the Political Bureau meeting by recalling the long-standing cooperation with the Region of Skåne, member of the CPMR for 16 years, and host of the Political Bureau 9 years ago in the city of Malmö. He thanked Ms Jähnke for her support and for hosting this meeting. President Loggen extended a special welcome to Honorary President Ms Annika Annerby Jansson, former CPMR President and CPMR Vice President for Transport, and current chair of the Migration Task Force.

Speaking about Migration, he stressed the urgency of refugee reception and integration, and the work carried by the Migration Task Force in sharing experiences and highlighting the important role that regions play in welcoming and integrating refugees in the European Union. He recalled that not all CPMR regions have the same levels of competence in external action or migration management, but they share a strong will to show solidarity in accordance with their capacities. President Loggen mentioned his role as member of the Migration Working Group in the Conference on the Future of Europe, where the call for financial, logistical, and operational EU support for regional authorities made by the CPMR, the Committee of the Regions and the Assembly of European Regions had been acknowledged and included in the proposals of the Conference final report.

Speaking about the ongoing war in Ukraine, President Loggen praised the determination of the Ukrainian people and its leadership to defend the freedom and the territorial integrity of their country, and reiterated the CPMR's support to Ukrainian regional authorities and cities. He recalled that Cohesion policy was the first EU instrument to mobilise emergency support for refugees fleeing war in Ukraine via the CARE packages that were put forward by the European Commission.

President Loggen welcomed the ambition shown by the REPowerEU proposals but warned against the shifting of resources from Cohesion policy, as this policy is in itself a tool to deliver energy-oriented projects to complement national energy efficiency plans. He reiterated the call of the CPMR to respect multilevel governance and for regions to participate fully in policy-making.



Moving on to Transport, President Loggen briefly spoke about the key TEN-T review, and the CPMR's call for a strong and flexible transport network that adapts to territorial challenges and ensures seamless and fair connectivity across Europe, included in the new policy position up for adoption during the meeting.

Regarding the last policy session of the Political Bureau meeting on the implementation of Cohesion policy, he insisted on the fact the new political initiatives at European level come with implications for the current programming period, as well as for the roll-out of new programmes. He recalled that the CPMR needs to take stock of the situation and anticipate a CPMR position ahead of the post-2027 Cohesion Policy debate.

President Loggen concluded his initial intervention by highlighting the importance of working together and undertaking joint action, as well as hearing and replying to the call of the youth.

The minutes of the Political Bureau meeting (25 March 2022, Barcelona-Spain) were unanimously adopted.

The Political Bureau approved the agenda for the day's meeting.

Eleni Marianou [presented](#) the CPMR's work since the last Political Bureau meeting, and the upcoming work looking ahead to the General Assembly in Crete. She reminded members where we stand in terms of strategy looking towards the new programming period. She stressed that the CPMR works in the interest of its members all of whom should find a place in its work, so that the European institutions recognise CPMR values and its members' needs and aspirations, and make sure that funding programmes work for the regions and their citizens.

Ms Marianou explained the ongoing strategy to influence EU policies and programmes, that started in 2021 with an evaluation of the implementation of EU core policy areas. It is currently in a reflection phase around the post-2027 period and will move on with the adoption of principles and detailed proposals ahead of the European Commission proposals on the future of the EU budget and core EU policies. Finally, it will analyse and react to the post-2027 proposals to initiate lobbying and influence the future of EU policies with a regional relevance.

She then went through the concrete action plan in the CPMR's main policy areas:

- Cohesion Policy & European budget
- Transport & Accessibility
- Climate & Energy
- Maritime Affairs & Fisheries
- Migration

SESSION 2 - REPOWER EU : WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR EUROPEAN REGIONS ?

Richard Sjölund (Ostrobothnia) opened the session by expressing his thoughts for the Ukrainian people. He then mentioned that the war in Ukraine had caused a disruption of the energy markets leading to an energy crisis that is impacting everybody and, in particular, the most vulnerable regions. Hence, the need to reduce the EU's dependence on Russian fossil fuels and build a Europe fuelled by clean energy, which are key objectives in REPowerEU.

To meet REPowerEU's objective, Member States will have to prepare ad hoc 'REPowerEU chapters' in their Recovery and Resilience Plans. A consultation process with regional authorities, among other stakeholders, will have to be conducted when drafting them. This could be the opportunity for chapters with place-based measures. For instance, the involvement of regions is instrumental for reforms and investments addressing the needs of the territories and supporting a just transition. However, there are some concerns that the involvement of regional authorities might be cosmetic.



He then mentioned how the possibility to transfer up to 12.5% of cohesion policy envelopes to the Recovery Plans could undermine territorial cohesion. There are perplexities on why this kind of transfer was proposed when the European Commission recognises that cohesion policy funds have a strong record of supporting energy-related investments. Thus, Member States should rather focus on fostering synergies and complementarity.

In the short-term there are going to be costs linked to REPowerEU, which will impact especially the most vulnerable businesses and households. The Social Climate Fund is mentioned as a tool to alleviate some of the impacts of REPowerEU, but it has been proposed for alleviating the ETS extensions to buildings and road transport and not for the current energy crisis. However, there are also many positive elements in REPowerEU - e.g. the attention given to hydrogen and the will to double the number of Hydrogen Valleys - showing that a multi-stakeholders approach can be successful.

The attention to boosting renewable energy (e.g. wind and solar) is certainly positive. For instance, solar energy is central in REPowerEU and has a great potential for both urban and less densely populated areas. The Commission's aim to establish an EU large-scale skills partnership for onshore renewable energy is welcomed and regions should be associated for the partnership to be a success.

He then concluded by stressing that regional authorities will have a pivotal role in the implementation of the REPowerEU plans, as they hold key competencies and know what is needed at the local level. Thus, to guarantee clean, affordable, and secure energy for all, it is imperative that regions are involved at early stages of policy drafting and in implementation.

Eero Ailio (DG ENER) in his [presentation](#) gave an overview of REPowerEU by mentioning short-term and medium-term objectives (e.g. renewable energy production or energy savings), specific measures, the role of regional and local authorities and its financing.

Debate

Valle Miguelez Santiago (Murcia) opened the debate by mentioning that Murcia region shares some of the proposals of REPowerEU, especially those aimed at developing renewable energy, in particular solar energy. Murcia is the fifth region in Spain in terms of solar farms, and predictions show that it should reach the renewable energy production objectives set in the Spanish National Energy and Climate Plan. In April 2022, 31.6% of energy was produced by renewable sources. The promotion of renewable energy is extremely important for the region and its economy. Moreover, there is a strong interest in green hydrogen and solar energy will be given priority.

Cohesion policy is the EU's principal investment policy and it is indispensable for all cities and regions for economic development, jobs, sustainable development, and protection of the environment. Cohesion policy also has supported the reduction of disparities among regions. The Covid crisis and the Ukrainian conflict are having negative impacts which will increase inequalities between regions. Therefore, Cohesion policy should be reinforced and made fit to new challenges.

REPowerEU is a new instrument, but in some cases new instruments might be less efficient. The objective of climate neutrality is already included in the 2021-2027 period, thus Cohesion policy is already contributing to a just and clean energy transition. To be effective, Cohesion policy should be reinforced rather than be subject to money transfer, as this could have negative impacts and increase inequalities. Moreover, with REPowerEU, the national governments rather than the regions will decide where to invest.



Jesper Skalberg Karlsson (Gotland) underlined the importance of REPowerEU and of reducing Europe's dependency on Russian fossil fuels and accelerating the energy transition given the current situation.

The aim of REPowerEU to accelerate the transition is welcomed, but carbon leakage is to be avoided. Gotland's cement factory is the second largest emitter in Sweden but at the same time is emitting less carbon dioxide than other cement plants. If it was closed, production would happen elsewhere with higher emissions, therefore having negative impacts on the economy, resilience, and supply-chain. Emissions are to be reduced but competitiveness and innovation is to be coupled with sustainable technologies.

Gotland has been appointed to be a frontrunner by the Swedish national government, as it is to be climate neutral by 2040 (five years before the national Swedish target). Islands can serve as 'testing ground' that islands in this respect. Learning quickly and more are key elements, especially when it comes to improving and refining multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance, to ensure that the transition is on track. Local and regional development strategies should take into account what is happening and national and EU level.

REPowerEU can lead to new opportunities for regions if intertwined and connected with regional development strategies. Concerning hydrogen, Gotland is looking into the transition its of ferry line from LNG to hydrogen in collaboration with academia and the ferry operator. The priority in REPowerEU to accelerate hydrogen is welcomed, as it is better to work towards highly efficient renewables rather than reduce, for example, ferry operations.

REPowerEU has a symbolic value as it can be a lighthouse to accelerate regional development plans. The energy transition requires strategic work, and a lot of regions have already realised that energy transition will be good for inhabitants, business, and sustainable tourism. Gotland needs help in addressing the national level in terms of support and funding which are needed to be successful. If REPowerEU gains strong support it can be something that regions can address when talking to the national level. If national governments are pushed from both the EU and regions, success can be achieved more easily rather than working independently.

Gotland, Sweden, the EU and all the regions have the potential to expand the production of renewables and fossil-free energy. It will take time, money, and energy but the benefits will be worth it.

Tjisse Stelpstra (Provincie Drenthe) welcomed the CPMR REPowerEU policy brief and mentioned that the CPMR North Sea Commission shares the concerns regarding the involvement of regional authorities by central governments in REPowerEU. Their involvement both at political and administrative level is key to bring along citizens in the proposed REPowerEU measures which might fail without public acceptance.

The European Council and European Parliament should therefore recognise the key role of regions in implementing policies on the ground and in democratically anchoring ambitious climate action among citizens; this by ensuring close collaboration with the CPMR and other relevant green deal groups. Europe has big plans and action must be taken to match such ambition. However, there are also obstacles to be faced about energy systems, hydrogen, and energy poverty.



As for energy systems, in the North Sea there is the aim of a fully renewable energy system. However, one of the obstacles is network congestion with longer connection times and this can frustrate business cases and slow down the energy transition and consequently hamper public acceptance. In the medium run this means that network operators must invest to accommodate more renewables and therefore rules are to be updated to facilitate this. However, smart solutions are also to be found in the short-term.

The potential that the green hydrogen has is high and the building of a regional hydrogen ecosystem will continue in the North Sea. However, the additionality principle from the production of green hydrogen should be removed. That means that hydrogen should be considered green and contributing to the obligations in industry and transport if the required electricity comes from renewable energy sources. But unlike the old Directive, the renewable electricity should not necessarily come from new wind farms and solar panels, instead it could come from a direct connection to nearby wind farms and solar park from the public network with guarantee that energy is green. This is key to promote the green hydrogen economy in Europe and regions.

He underlined that 32 million Europeans are living in energy poverty. The impact of the pandemic and the war Ukraine, with skyrocketing bills, has made the situation even worse. The Social Climate Fund should work for those most in need in an easy and less bureaucratic way. The transition to a carbon neutral and sustainable circular economy must be inclusive and just. It should also not create extra burden to citizens to access essential services.

He then concluded by mentioning that the CPMR North Sea Commission underlines the importance of regional authorities' role in the proposed EU partnership for skills on onshore renewable energy within the Pact of Skills. In this respect, it is positive that the European Commission mentions that training cooperation must include regional authorities.

Stéphane Perrin (Brittany) stressed the importance of the topic for peripheral regions and for Brittany, being a 'peninsula', facing difficulties in terms of electricity supply. For instance, Brittany produces only 18% of the electricity it consumes. Thus, the challenge in the very short term is to develop offshore wind to ensure electricity production, which is happening also with other European regions via the Celtic Connector.

Mobility, in general, requires significant investments by regions. Brittany is renewing its ferry fleet, serving its multiple islands, but it is a huge investment given how each ferry is unique as it is to be adapted to the port infrastructure and navigation context (e.g. sea currents and winds). These are investments with unique objectives; thus, the priority should be to remove obstacles for accessing EU financing.

He then raised some concerns that sometimes the EU is contradictory. For example, there are very tight deadlines to mobilise EU funds, but at the same time the administrative burdens make it quite difficult to mobilise them in such a short amount of time. Something that is also shared by the beneficiaries of EU funding, such as citizens and businesses.

There might be some contradictions in the eligible expenditures depending on the mode of transport which needs to be updated. If it is not possible to finance these investments in the short term to LNG and to hydrogen, there is a risk the transition will not happen. There are sometimes also some problems of geographical eligibility as financing is generally directed to the less favoured areas, but the ERDF cannot be used and the EAFRD is not the right tool in this case.



He concluded that the possible transfer of part of the ERDF envelope to the national government is worrisome. There is a strong ‘temptation’ to centralise, such as in the case of the CAP in France, but this is far from what is also mentioned by the EC that regions are stakeholders in the transition.

Eero Ailio thanked the speakers for the interesting debate and the useful feedback. He responded to the comments as follows:

- Investments in solar are extremely important in the context. For instance, the Solar Rooftop initiative will be relevant for regions, given that 70% of what is in the ‘legislation’ is happening at regional and local levels.
- There are a lot of expectations about hydrogen. There is indeed complexity in terms of managing funds and programmes. The Commission has tried to address it by simplifying rules, making them ‘shared’ and fostering combinability.
- Energy poverty is now a topic on which there is a strong focus. The additionality principle is a complex topic: the underpinning logic is that you have to add green renewable energy to power the electrolyzers that are producing green hydrogen, so as to not take away from the already existing renewable energy production capacity and then create shortage somewhere else.

Richard Sjölund closed the session mentioning that the CPMR General Secretariat will monitor the REPowerEU plan implementation and the debate on the Fit for 55 package, which constitutes the basis for REPowerEU.

In this respect, he stressed that unfortunately the European Parliament was not able to reach an agreement on some key dossiers such as ETS2 and the Social Climate Fund. The progress made in the Parliament should not be lost, such as in the case of the definitions of energy and mobility poverty which are to be anchored to the most vulnerable territories.

He concluded by highlighting that involving regions in REPowerEU will be key to achieve a clean, affordable, and secure energy for all and that regions must be empowered for the energy transition to happen.

SESSION 3 - REGIONS AT THE FOREFRONT OF SOLIDARITY WITH UKRAINE

Annika Annerby Jansson (Region Skåne) introduced the session. She recalled that the Bureau had adopted a statement at its meeting in Barcelona on 25 March [The CPMR stands by Ukraine in full solidarity](#).

First, she mentioned the important role of regions and local authorities in the reception and integration of refugees from Ukraine. Second, peer-to-peer cooperation between EU cities and regions and their counterparts in Ukraine can make an important contribution to reconstruction and also help Ukrainian local authorities build capacities in the context of the country’s EU accession process.

She gave some examples of how solidarity is being manifested in Skåne region, including donations of medical supplies, provision of healthcare to refugees, validation of skills to aid integration in the workplace and summer camps for Ukrainian and Swedish children.

Daive Strangis (CPMR) as moderator of the session recalled the results of a questionnaire circulated among members on solidarity with Ukraine and discussed at the Migration Task Force meeting of 17 May. Fifteen contributions had been received from North and South of Europe. Preliminary conclusions are:



- Regions are supporting and channelling solidarity efforts of citizens and other actors in their territory as well as providing direct donations and funds to Ukraine;
- CPMR regions are facing the same common challenges and needs when it comes to reception and integration of refugees. The most urgent being healthcare (including mental health), education and schooling, housing, employment and prevention of trafficking;
- The regions have a clear role in multilevel coordination in order to pool efforts and implement actions on the ground;
- With regard to the European Commission's proposed reallocation of structural funds through CARE (Cohesion's Actions for Refugees in Europe), the regions welcome the swift action of the EU and highlight the positive benefit of flexibility in the use of EU funds. However, on the negative side, the administrative burden does not match the emergency nature of the spending, there is a lack of guidelines from the EC, and there exists a risk of moving funds away from other regional development actions. Finally, integration and socio-economic inclusion is a long-term process requiring sustainable sources of funding.

Mr Strangis stated that there are opportunities for regional authorities to collaborate with Ukraine through the Council of Europe twinning platform [Cities4Cities](#) and the new [Alliance](#) of the Committee of the Regions.

Bert Kuby (Committee of the Regions) presented the "European Alliance of cities and regions for the reconstruction of Ukraine" due to be launched on 30 June 2022. See [Powerpoint presentation](#) for full details.

Debate

Jari Nahkanen (BSC/Oulu) highlighted several impacts for Finnish regions. First, the suspension of cross-border cooperation projects, trade and tourism with Russia had resulted in loss of funding and development opportunities for regions in Eastern Finland. Second, events had accelerated the geopolitical and strategic change in the Baltic Sea and Arctic region. The future of the Arctic must be a priority and the EU should strengthen interregional cooperation initiatives between northern Finland, Sweden, and Norway. Key areas of action to boost resilience and self-sufficiency are improving transport routes, security policy and ensuring security of supply.

Montserrat Riba Cunill (Catalonia) highlighted that while Catalonia was used to receiving migrants, the situation of Ukrainian refugees was new, give their large number and specific characteristics being mainly families of vulnerable people (old persons, women and children). The immediate priority is to provide access to health including psychological support, ensure rapid integration into the labour market, and scolarise children. Regions and local authorities are providing solutions in a multilateral and coordinated way to ensure the sustainable long-term integration of refugees. She called for continued EU support towards these efforts.

Valle Miguelez Santiago (Murcia) indicated that Murcia Region was working with all levels to provide a common response model for the protection and reception of Ukrainian refugees. The region has drawn up a contingency plan in this regard focused on the comprehensive care of refugees and adopting a multilevel governance approach that also promotes collaboration between the public sector, the private sector and civil society organisations. In addition, Murcia Region has developed a programme for businesses affected by the war in Ukraine to help them find alternative markets and maintain supply chains. Finally, Ms Miguelez confirmed Murcia's willingness to collaborate in the Committee of the Regions' initiative for the reconstruction of Ukraine.



Annika Annerby Jansson summed up the session, remarking on the widespread solidarity shown in the regions and also noting in the context of the Ukrainian conflict that Arctic cooperation will be an important focus in the coming months. The CPMR will collaborate within the “European Alliance of cities and regions for the reconstruction of Ukraine” and further EU initiatives on the matter. It will also be important to avoid overlapping between similar initiatives.

SESSION 4 - FOCUS ON THE REVIEW OF THE TEN-T

Valle Miguelez Santiago (Murcia) and **Lucas Bosser**, CPMR Director for Transport, presented CPMR Policy Position on the review of the TEN-T. Ms Miguelez shared with the member regions the outcomes of the meetings she had with key MEPs.

Debate

Anna Jähnke, Representative of region Skåne and Chairman of the Regional Development Board, underlined the importance of cross border sections in the implementation of the TEN-T. She regretted that the Regulation falls short in properly involving regional authorities its implementation and governance scheme. She also called for upgrading the port of Helsingborg from the comprehensive to the core network.

Tjisse Stelpstra (NSC / Provincie Drenthe), underlined that the Policy Position presented was very much in line with [the messages of the North Sea Commission](#).

Tomas Mörtzell (Västerbotten) recalled that the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas, such as his Region, face specific challenges that should be better tackled in the Regulation. For instance, he explained that the criteria to identify the urban nodes of the TEN-T should be adapted allowing one node for each NUTS3 Region.

Richard Sjölund (Ostrobothnia) recalled that the war in Ukraine highlights the importance of security of supply for the EU and the crucial role of ports in this regard. He regretted, therefore, that two ports have been excluded from the TEN-T in his Region considering their strategic importance. He called the CPMR to defend the re-integration of these ports into the network.

The Political Bureau adopted the Policy Position on TEN-T including the 3 amendments submitted by member Regions.

Erik Bergkvist MEP stated that EU transport policies aim to bring Europeans together. The TEN-T should therefore tend towards tackling the EU as a single country where one could travel through it without barriers. To achieve this objective, the Regulation must be open to future innovations and technological breakthrough. That may imply a more regular revision instead of waiting 10 long years every time. Likewise, it should better engage with regional and local authorities. He also mentioned the elephant in the room that is the funding of the TEN-T. In this regard, he called for an open debate within the EU institution and innovative solutions.

SESSION 5 – COHESION POLICY: FOCUS ON IMPLEMENTATION

Stéphane Perrin (Brittany) commented on the numerous challenges facing the Cohesion Policy and that represent a potential threat to its future. The main challenges to this central and strategic EU policy are:

- Programming delays, which can make it difficult to keep to the implementation schedule and can hinder the regions’ attempts to make full use of Cohesion Policy instruments. Heightened



vigilance and mobilisation will be required to ensure kick-off dates are respected and thus avoid any negative impact on the next programming period, starting in 2027;

- Potential competition between the funds used by regions and those used by States (such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility). This can lead to inefficiency, in addition to the administrative burden involved in EU funding;
- The multiplicity of instruments and the overlapping of timetabling, which call for increased administrative capacities at the regional level, capacities that are not available in the less well developed regions;
- The impact of the Ukrainian crisis, which varies from one region to another;
- The harmonisation and review of the regulations.

Brittany shares in full the observations made by CPMR and defends four priorities:

- Prioritise the principles of trust and prevention rather than obligation and sanctions with regard to the use and implementation of funds;
- Harmonise the regulations to ensure capacity building;
- Make it easier for the beneficiaries to use EU funds;
- Make the funds available more quickly.

The regions have the capacity to absorb EU funds and to use them efficiently. It is essential not to lose sight of the objective to simplify the Cohesion Policy. The regions must draw the attention of the European institutions to the complexity of the instruments.

Francesco Molica (CPMR) informed the meeting that the European Commission intends to carry out a targeted review of the regulations applying to the 2014-2020 and the 2021-2027 programming periods, to allow managing authorities greater flexibility in adapting to the multifaceted crisis and to facilitate Cohesion Policy implementation. The efforts made by the regions and the added value of Cohesion Policy need to be promoted.

Irène Tolleret (MEP) said that the CPMR's positions and its activities were an important reference for the work of the European Parliament in the area of Cohesion Policy. Recent crises had shown Cohesion Policy to be a modern, flexible instrument that could be deployed rapidly in response to emergency situations. It remains nonetheless a policy of long-term investment, and this principle needs to be defended in the face of current proposals aiming to alter its nature and weaken it. Any proposal aiming to reduce the Cohesion Policy budget in order to fund emergency reserves and other centrally managed instruments is a false good idea and runs counter to the very nature of the policy.

One serious impact of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine is the delay in implementing the 2021-2027 programming period. Ms Tolleret regretted that Member States had not considered the Cohesion Policy and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) in tandem from a budgetary and operational point of view, as this could have avoided the delays. Rather than prioritising the implementation of national recovery and resilience plans, it would have been better to establish a complementarity between the cohesion programme and the RRF. Ms Tolleret remained concerned that under-utilisation could lead to calls for a reduced Cohesion Policy budget in the next programming period. It is essential to have an emergency plan to mitigate the increase in under-utilisation and decommitment arising from delayed kick-off of programmes.

The closure of the 2014-2020 programming period has also been disrupted. Companies and local and regional authorities are facing record lead times for their operations because of problems with availability of raw materials or overall increases in costs. There is a risk of automatic decommitment



and loss of appropriations. It is essential therefore to allow operations to be phased through to the 2021-2027 programmes, to ensure their continuity, and also to draw up a contingency plan allowing for flexibility in scheduling at the end of the programming period as well as measures to limit automatic decommitment.

Ms Tolleret mentioned further points related to complexity:

- managing authorities should be supported in implementing appropriations linked to CARE and CARE+ through further simplification. The idea of a single file for this type of operation could significantly simplify implementation.
- The voluntary transfers from the Common Agricultural Policy and the Cohesion Policy to finance measures aiming to achieve energy independence, authorised by the EC, benefit a very small group of Member States which will make use of this additional flexibility. However, this new use of Cohesion Policy to tackle crises once again threatens to weaken the policy, its nature and its long-term objectives.
- In the light of these developments we need to give serious thought to the future Cohesion Policy including post-2027. Simplification of the policy, to make implementation much simpler and quicker, is one key aspect. It is essential to avoid the gold-plating of “European Union” rules by Member States. The relationship between the EC and the managing authorities also needs to change, developing into a trust-based contract. This should lead the EC to be more flexible in terms of its auditing requirements, once the managing authorities have demonstrated the efficiency of their good functioning.

Ms Tolleret concluded by stressing that if we want the Cohesion Policy to have a great future and not be weakened by budgetary cuts or modifications to its very nature, then it needs to be rethought to make it simpler, more citizen-friendly and commensurate with the continent’s major challenges.

Francesco Molica (CPMR) welcomed the EP’s proposal for a plan to help managing authorities implement the new programmes to make up for the programming delays. He supported the important point made about transfers from the CAP, the Cohesion Policy or even REPowerEU to the recovery plan; these are a matter of real concern and not a good sign for the Cohesion Policy and its future.

Debate: Where are we regarding the implementation of 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy? What are the main challenges at this stage?

Tomas Mörtzell (Västerbotten) agreed that the development of the investment instruments of Cohesion Policy was a political issue and that it was important for the regions to take ownership of this concept. He called for the role of the regions to be strengthened. There is a continuing trend towards centralisation of the instruments and it is important to ensure that the regions retain control of them. The EU should continue to promote growth and innovation, as well as specialisation strategies for all EU investments, while transforming the industrial sector and promoting sustainable development.

Francesco Molica agreed that the specialisation strategies were a model that should be used more widely and integrated into other EU instruments.

Montserrat Riba Cunill (Catalonia) made an urgent plea for simplification of the Cohesion Policy. She deplored the centralisation of certain Cohesion Policy instruments and the low level of regional involvement in implementation and decision-making. This should be brought to the attention of the European institutions. She underlined payment delays, overlapping timetables, and the complexity of projects and of the submission procedure for project proposals. The Intermediterranean



Commission calls on the EC to guarantee that regions will be able to carry their projects over to the following period in the light of the delays in closing the 2014-2020 period and the adoption of national plans for the post-2021 period.

Francesco Molica confirmed that the CPMR would be putting forward a number of proposed amendments targeting the legislation for the 2021-2027 period, aimed at enabling the managing authorities to carry over projects from one period to the next.

Valle Miguelez Santiago (Murcia) commented on the significant delays in the preparation and adoption of programmes. These represent a risk of loss of appropriations for the regions and delayed implementation of the 2021-2027 programming period. She called on the EC to incorporate, for this autumn, the amendments allowing for greater flexibility and the extension of the periods. She said it was important, in the face of unforeseen events and crises, not to forget the long-term aims and objectives of the Cohesion Policy. She underlined the demands of the results-based approach and recognised the progress made in terms of simplification and adoption of programmes. Coordination would be crucial for the 2021-2027 period.

Francesco Molica confirmed that flexibility was needed to ensure project implementation and avoid delays. CPMR is committed to lobbying the EC in favour of such flexibility.

Irène Tolleret (MEP) pointed out that the Cohesion Policy had contributed to the shaping of the European Union. It applies to the regions and, unlike the centralised instruments, enables actions at local and cross-border level. For this reason it is very important to retain a place-based approach. Instruments have been created that can respond to highly localised and specific needs. Therefore we cannot have a proliferation of overlapping, and even competing, funds with different rules governing participation and different eligibility criteria. Such complexity delays project implementation and does not leave enough time for discussion on the consequences of the crisis such as inflation, shortages of raw materials, etc. In her opinion the Cohesion Policy should be removed from the Stability Pact.

Francesco Molica reminded members that a potential reform of the Stability Pact was being considered and that CPMR hoped that its proposal would be taken into consideration.

Stéphane Perrin (Brittany) emphasised the convergence between the positions of the EP and the CPMR. This is very important in view of the EP's role in the process of drafting regulations but also with regard to the drafting of the EP's budget. It was important not to lose sight of the aims of Cohesion Policy. He underlined the verticality which had dominated, to the detriment of efficiency, during the crisis. He called for a reflection on post-2027 programming to avoid finding ourselves once again facing the same challenges.

Mr Perrin concluded the session and invited the CPMR and its members to work on both technical and political aspects:

- assess the exact absorption of EU funds to demonstrate clearly that the regions know how to use and absorb the funds, and that there is no automatic decommitment. This could be done by means of a survey of CPMR members.
- Set up a “technical” working group on the simplification of Cohesion Policy, made up of regional and EC representatives, with national auditors also contributing. This would enable points to be tested on which solutions could be found rapidly.
- Organise meetings between representatives of the CPMR member regions and the relevant European Commission Directorates, as well as MEPS, to put forward views and to avoid the Cohesion Policy becoming unravelled.



SESSION 6 - CPMR MEMBERSHIP STRATEGY AND MEMBER'S SURVEY

Following **President Loggen's** introduction to the session, CPMR Executive Directors **Daive Strangis** and **Nicolas Brookes** presented proposals summing up the debates of the previous Political Bureau meeting in Barcelona on 25 March (see [Powerpoint Presentation](#)).

Eleni Marianou added some comments on the CPMR's specificities and how it had evolved over the years to remain an effective lobbying organisation.

The President opened the floor for further discussion.

Debate

Annika Annerby Jansson (Skåne) felt that efforts should be concentrated on the EU arena and UK and Norway.

John Borg (Gozo) highlighted that due to Gozo's geographical location in the middle of the Mediterranean, it was important to have good connections with non-EU countries. The neighbourhood dimension should be taken into account in policies addressed by the CPMR. From an island perspective, he wished to re-engage with former island members in the UK and Denmark. The CPMR's membership capital is what provides benefits for its members allowing them for example to exchange knowledge and benefit from funding through Interreg projects. Youth is an important topic to address in relation to cohesion, awareness raising on democracy and blue careers. Complicated travel itineraries and scheduling several meetings close together constitute the main obstacles to attending CPMR physical meetings. As a solution there could be more meetings in hybrid format or located in reachable hubs.

Richard Sjölund (Ostrobothnia) stated that while non-EU members should of course be welcomed, the CPMR should concentrate on Europe and EU regions as a priority, since its aim is to influence EU institutions. Focus in the post pandemic period should be on consolidating rather than expanding membership. It is important to maintain the benefit of physical meetings. The CPMR should make available documentation to present what we have achieved in a simple and understandable way.

Valle Miguelez (Murcia) appreciated the briefing notes and felt that hybrid meetings are a good idea. Membership expansion towards non-EU regions should be towards geopolitically stable regions with active decentralisation processes. Thematic pillars should be coherent with this expansion. It is necessary to show to both EU and neighbourhood regions how the CPMR as a lobbying group can be important for them. Geographical Commissions should be able to decide to open to non-EU members. Finally, she agreed that the CPMR should strengthen links with youth to promote the work of regions. Part of the organisation's budget could be used to allow young people to participate actively in CPMR events.

Stéphane Pérrin (Brittany) was unsure there could be a general rule about expanding to non-EU members. This was done naturally depending on the geographical area. It actually seems more difficult to recruit EU members who need to be convinced of the CPMR's effectiveness. The CPMR's strength is that as a coalition of European regions its voice is heard by the EU institutions. Regarding meetings, the Political Bureau and General Assembly should be a place for debate and defining the mandate of the Vice-Presidents rather than listening to long speeches. While virtual meetings are useful, we should not replace physical meetings or meet for example in Brussels which would amount to denying who we are. Travelling allows members to discover other regions' territories and contribute to the richness of the organisation.



Jari Nahkanen (BSC/Oulu) agreed that the CPMR needs to be more political and that we should focus on consolidating membership. He highlighted risks related to inactive members and changes in political and technical representatives who need to understand why it is important to engage in an organisation like the CPMR. He asked what was the strategy to consolidate membership and promote active involvement.

Tsjisse Stelpstra (NSC/Provincie Drenthe) mentioned that the North Sea Commission could play a role in filling some gaps on the membership map. He mentioned that the NSC already carries out work with youth for which it has an allocated budget. Finally, he urged to go “from slides to action”.

Montserrat Riba Cunill (Catalonia) believed that expansion is always positive provided that members are active. The focus should be perhaps on EU regions without excluding non-EU members. In terms of policy work, the CPMR works on concrete issues of direct concern to its members which allows it to be taken seriously. Youth for example is a more global issue not necessarily limited to peripheral maritime regions. We should remain focused. Virtual meetings could be reserved for technical discussions, but physical meetings remain essential for networking. However too many meetings can be counterproductive.

President Loggen summed up the debates in three points:

1. Main criteria for expanding membership should be stable democracies and mutual interest
2. More hybrid meetings could be held when necessary
3. Youth is an area in which the CPMR could invest in the future.

SESSION 7 - FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

1/ Financial issues

Gunn Marit Helgesen, Vice-President and Treasurer, presented the CPMR’s financial situation.

2021 Annual accounts

The accounts for 2021 showed a negative result of €52,848. This negative result is mainly because the NSC decided not to call the 2021 fees. Had they done so, the final result would have been positive. Compared to the 2021 adopted budget, the good situation can be mainly explained by a reduction in expenditure of €282,168 due to a cutback in travel and meeting expenses because of the pandemic.

The 2021 total fees amounted to €2,738,383. Compared to the adopted budget, there was a fall in income of the NSC fees. In 2021, some members were written off the accounts and some members informed of their departure at the end of 2021: Umbria (Italy), Satakunta (Finland), and Cornwall in 2022 (UK). These departures were mainly based on political grounds. On a more positive note, the CPMR welcomed a new member, Östergötland from Sweden.

The provision for 2021 unpaid fees amounted to €57,811 and covered the risk of non-payment of 2021 fees from some regions of Albania, Italia, Morocco, Greece and United Kingdom. Two of these regions did pay in the end, which will have a positive impact on the 2022 result. €41,182 of unpaid fees, at the end of 2021, were not provisioned. However, these fees were not considered as uncertain but only late.

The Treasurer proposed to deduct the negative result of €52,841 from the CPMR reserve fund. The accumulated Fund would then stand at €1,938,855.

She then gave the floor to the CPMR’s **auditor** (Cabinet Mazars) represented by Ludovic Sevestre.



Mr Sevestre said that the auditors had not identified any deficiencies in internal control that needed to be communicated to the Political Bureau, or any material misstatements that stood uncorrected in the accounts. On this basis, and after confirming the financial information, Mazars expected to be in a position to issue an unqualified opinion on the Association's 2021 accounts.

The Treasurer thanked Mr Sevestre and proposed that the Political Bureau vote on the accounts, on the basis of the 2021 annual accounts.

The accounts for 2021 were unanimously adopted

Progress report on the 2022 budget

At this stage of the year, a negative result of €91 824 is forecast. However, this may be compensated -as in previous years where we had finally very positive budgetary results- by future funding from EU projects.

Expected membership fees was €2,836,895 including this time, the NSC fees.

A provision of €12 264 was made for unpaid fees.

The total annual expenditure is estimated to €4 096 183, where notably there is an increase in travel and meeting expenses after the pandemic.

Outlook for 2023

Firstly, an expected reform of Norwegian local government in 2023 should lead to some regions being split and more county councils being created which could bring more members.

The proposal includes a 2.70 % increase in CPMR and most of Geographical Commissions fees, corresponding to the 2020-2021 annual average inflation rate between Belgium and France.

At this stage, the outlook budget for 2023 shows a potential deficit of €443,474, because several EU projects will end in 2022 as part of a normal circle. New projects have been submitted, others are in the pipeline and the result of the evaluations will be available during the second half of 2022 and beginning of 2023.

Scenarios have been written with the aim of balancing the budget for 2023.

Proposal for 2022 membership fees for British regions

Davide Strangis explained the specific issue of British regions following Brexit.

Concerning the schedule of fees, the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union and European Economic Area had brought to light an issue with the application of the schedule of fees for CPMR member regions. The current schedule for members outside the European Economic Area was designed for less developed members from the neighbourhood. If applied to UK member regions, it would result in an overall loss of around €58 000.

A new proposal (see [Powerpoint presentation](#)) was therefore developed adding new levels of membership fees according to the population and GDP, only for regions from countries of the European continent. This new schedule would not entail any change in the amount of membership fees.

The proposal for the new schedule of membership fees was unanimously approved.



2/ General Assembly of the CPMR in Crete (Greece) on 26-28 October 2022

Eleni Marianou stated that the General Assembly would be held in Crete on 26-28 October 2022. Members had received the draft agenda. She noted that a session would be dedicated to the results of the survey that had been discussed in Session 6. She then passed the floor to George Alexakis.

Before Mr Alexakis's presentation of, a [video](#) on Crete was played.

George Alexakis (Crete) then [presented](#) his region and in particular the venue "Wyndham Grand Crete Mirabello Bay, Agios Nikolaos" where the General Assembly would be hosted and all the facilities related to the organisation.

Eleni Marianou submitted the draft Agenda for the 50th CPMR General Assembly to members for approval.

This draft agenda of the 2022 CPMR General Assembly was unanimously adopted

3/ Forthcoming meetings of the CPMR

Eleni Marianou announced the next CPMR meetings:

Political Bureau

- 3 March 2023, Cartagena (Murcia, Spain): A [video presentation](#) was played about Murcia Region and city of Cartagena, where the meeting would take place.

General Assembly

- 26-28 October 2022, Agios Nikolaos (Crete, Greece)
- October 2023, Brittany (France) with the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the CPMR.

CONCLUSIONS

Before concluding the meeting **President Loggen** announced the departure of Nicolas Brookes from the CPMR and thanked him for the great work done for the CPMR. **Nicolas Brookes** made a farewell speech.

President Cees Loggen concluded the proceedings and warmly thanked the Region of Skåne for its hospitality and the warm welcome extended to the participants. He also thanked the guest speakers and the members of the Political Bureau for their active involvement and contributions to the various debates. Finally, he thanked CPMR staff and the interpreters for the quality of their work. He then invited the Bureau members to meet again in Crete (Greece) on 26-28 October 2022 for the 50th General Assembly of the CPMR.