



ONLINE MEETING OF THE CPMR POLITICAL BUREAU

11 June 2020 (10h30-14h30)

Participants:

President

- Vasco Alves **CORDEIRO**, President, Regional Government of the Azores (Portugal)

1st Vice-President and Treasurer

- Gunn Marit **HELGESEN**, Councillor of Vestfold og Telemark (Norway)

Vice-Presidents

- **Cimate & Energy**: Cees **LOGGEN**, Regional Minister of Noord-Holland (The Netherlands)
- **Cohesion Policy**: Enrico **ROSSI**, President, Tuscany Region (Italy)
- **Maritime Affairs**: George **ALEXAKIS**, Vice-Governor, Crete Region (Greece)
- **Neighbourhood Policy**: Horia **TEODORESCU**, President of Tulcea County Council (Romania) **represented by** Dumitru **MERGEANI**, Vice-President, Tulcea County Council, Tulcea County Council (Romania)
- **Transport & Accessibility**: Francisco **MARTÍN GALLEGO**, Consejero de Innovación, Industria, Comercio y Transporte, Gobierno de Cantabria

Full members

- **Cyprus** Anthoulla **CHARALAMBOUS SAVVIDES**, Head of Policy & European Affairs Unit, Ministry of Interior
- **Denmark** Claus **KJELDTSEN**, Councillor, Region Midtjylland
- **Finland** Kristiina **HÄMÄLÄINEN**, Vice-Chair of the Board, Regional Council of Päijät-Häme
- **France** Loïg **CHESNAIS-GIRARD**, President of the Regional Council of Brittany and Forough **SALAMI-DADKHAH**, Vice-President, Regional Council of Brittany
- **Georgia** Alexander **MOTSERELIA**, State Representative-Governor, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Region
- **Greece** *See Vice-Presidents*
- **Ireland** Niamh **KENNEDY**, Councillor, Donegal County council
- **Italy** *See Vice-Presidents*
- **The Netherlands** *See Vice-Presidents*
- **Norway** *See 1st Vice-President*
- **Portugal** *See President*

- **Romania** *See Vice-President*
- **Spain** *See Vice-President*
- **Sweden** Annika **SANDSTRÖM**, Chair of Stockholm County Council
- **United Kingdom** Julian **GERMAN**, Leader, Cornwall Council

Honorary Members

Annika **ANNERBY JANSSON**, President Skåne Regional Council and Chair of CPMR Task Force Migration (Sweden)

Geographical Commissions

- **Atlantic Arc Commission**

Christelle MORANÇAIS, President of the Atlantic Arc Commission - President of Pays de la Loire Region (France) **represented** by Vanessa **CHARBONNEAU**, Vice-president, Regional Council of Pays de la Loire
Katie **CAVELL**, Executive Secretary

- **Balkan and Black Sea Commission**

Valentin **MOLDOVEANU**, Acting President of the **Balkan & Black Sea** Commission - County Councillor, Tulcea County Council (Romania)

Stavros **KALOGNOMOS**, Executive Secretary

- **Baltic Sea Commission**

Jari **NAHKANEN**, President of the Baltic Sea Commission - Member of the Board, Council of Oulu Region (Finland)

Åsa **BJERING**, Executive Secretary

- **Intermediterranean Commission**

Guillaume **CROS**, Acting President of the **Intermediterranean** Commission - Vice-President of Occitanie Region (France)

Elodie **NUNES**, Executive Secretary

- **Islands Commission**

Gilles **SIMEONI**, President of the **Islands** Commission – President of the Executive Council of Corsica (France)

Giuseppe **SCIACCA**, Executive Secretary

- **North Sea Commission**

Kerstin **BRUNNSTRÖM**, President of the North Sea Commission and Regional Councillor, Region Västra Götaland (Sweden)

Magnus **ENGELBREKTSSON**, Executive Secretary (Sweden)

Representative of the Outermost Regions

- Soibahadine **IBRAHIM RAMADANI**, President of “Conseil Départemental” of Mayotte (France) **represented** by Mohamed **SIDI**, Vice-President, “Conseil Départemental” of Mayotte (France)

Alternate members

- **Albania** Aldrin **DALIPI**, President of the Regional and Municipal Council of Tirana
- **Cyprus** Eleni **PATSALOU KYRIAKIDOU**, Administrative Officer A', Ministry of Interior
- **Denmark** Arne **NIELSEN**, Councillor, Region Nordjylland
- **Estonia** Kristiina **MARIPUU**, Deputy Mayor, Saaremaa Municipality
- **Finland** Steven **FROSTDAHL**, Vice-Chair of the Board, Regional Council of Ostrobothnia
- **Malta** John **BORG**, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Gozo

- **Norway** Marianne **CHESAK**, County Mayor, Rogaland County
- **Romania** Marian **DINULESCU**, Vice-President, Calarasi County Council
- **Sweden** Pontus **LINDBERG**, Vice-President, Region Skåne
- **United Kingdom** John **REYNOLDS**, Councillor, Aberdeen City Council

Alternate representatives of Presidents of Geographical Commissions

- **Baltic Sea Commission**

Annika **SANDSTRÖM**, President of Stockholm County Council (Sweden)

- **Islands Commission**

Jesper **SKALBERG KARLSSON**, Deputy Mayor, Region Gotland (Sweden)

Guests / Speakers

- **European Commission**

Marc **LEMAÎTRE**, Director General of the DG REGIO

- **European Parliament**

Younous **OMARJEE**, Chair of REGI Committee

Supporting Officers

Justin **AMIOT**, Adviser to the President, Regional council of Brittany (FR)

James **ARNOLD**, Assistant Economic Growth Officer, Cornwall County (UK)

Michèle **BALOURD**, Directrice des Affaires européennes et de la coopération régionale, Conseil départemental de Mayotte (FR)

Peder **BANG**, International Advisor, Region Midtjylland (DK)

Merten **BARNERT**, Deputy Director, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (DE)

Núria **BEDÓS**, Asesora, Generalitat de Catalunya (ES)

Ioana **COMSA**, Senior Inspector, Tulcea Council/Tulcea County Council (RO)

Cyrielle **CUIRASSIER**, Chargée de la Représentation institutionnelle affaires européennes de Mayotte, Délégation de Mayotte à Paris (FR)

Elena **CURTOPASSI**, Social Policy Officer- International Relations, Veneto Region (IT)

Mercedes **GALLEGO**, Tecnico Responsable UE, Murcia Region (ES)

Anais **GIRARD**, European project Manager, Pays de la Loire Region (FR)

Karen **GREVE SOMERSET**, International coordinator, Region Nordjylland (DK)

Joy **HARRON**, Strategic Funding Unit, Donegal County Council (IE)

Lars **HAUKVIK**, International Adviser, Vestfold & Telemark fylkeskommune (NO)

Emirjona **HUTI**, Adviser, Tirana Regional Council (AL)

Andrea **JAKOVA**, Director for International Affairs, Shkodra Region (AL)

Emily **KENT**, Head of Economy, Skills and Culture, Cornwall County (UK)

Agata **KOWAL**, External Funding & Policy Officer, Aberdeen City Council (UK)

Harri **KUUSELA**, Project Manager, Regional Council of Päijät-Häme (FI)

Claire **LE TERTRE**, Head of European Unit, Regional council of Brittany (FR)

Laure **LHERMET**, Chargée de relations internationales et méditerranéennes, Région Occitanie (FR)

Maria **LINDBOM**, Senior Advisor International Affairs, Region Skåne (SE)

Juan Jose **MARTINEZ**, DG European Union Affairs, Murcia Region (ES)

Enrique **MUNARRIZ**, Head of Cabinet Minister of Transports, Government of Cantabria (ES)

Felipe **PIÑA**, Director General of Transports, Government of Cantabria (ES)
 Laure **PRAT**, Directrice relations européennes et internationales, Région Occitanie (FR)
 Toivo **RIIMAA**, Deputy Director, Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (EE)
 Chiara **ROSSETTO**, Senior Officer, Veneto Region (IT)
 Daniela **SABINO**, Assistant Director for Tourism and Economic Development, Ministry for Gozo (MT)
 Kristina **SHONIA**, Assistant of the State Representative-Governor of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Region (GE)
 Geir **SØR-REIME**, International Adviser, Rogaland County Council (NO)
 Wim **STOOKER**, EU Representative, Province of Noord-Holland (NL)
 Francisco **TAVARES**, Advisor to the President of the Regional Government of the Azores (PT)
 Tetiana **UZHVIY**, Head of Kherson regional Investment promotion office, Kherson regional state administration (UA)
 Inma **VALENCIA**, Director Brussels Office, Government of Cantabria (ES)
 Adrachi **VELOU**, Head of Service, Department of Mayotte (FR)
 Anu **VARES**, Development Adviser, Saaremaa Municipality Government (EE)
 Olena **YAKUBA**, Head of Sector for Foreign Economic Affairs and International Technical Assistance, Kherson Regional State Administration (UA)

CPMR General Secretariat

Eleni **MARIANO**, Secretary General of the CPMR
 Nicolas **BROOKES**, Executive Director
 Davide **STRANGIS**, Executive Director
 Lucas **BOSSER**, Director of Transport
 Marie-Agnès **CHARON**, Director of Administration and Coordination
 Francesco **MOLICA**, Director of Cohesion Policy
 Ana **CANOMANUEL**, Communications and Marketing Officer
 Francesco **CATTE**, Policy Officer
 Valérie **FITOUSSI**, PA to the Secretary General

INTRODUCTION

Vasco Cordeiro, President of CPMR and President of the Government of the Azores, welcomed participants to this “first online meeting” of the Political Bureau, which was being held in exceptional circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He resumed the situation in Europe over the last three months: divided Member States, a real effort by the Commission to contain the situation caused by the health crisis, the responses of regional politicians in tackling the crisis and helping their populations, and a European Parliament that has pursued its efforts to push forward with the European project in spite of the pressures created by this unprecedented situation. The pandemic has put severe strain on the European project but we must not allow it to paralyse Europe or the regions. The opportunity must be seized to relaunch a new Europe, focused on our shared values: union and solidarity; values that had been celebrated in May on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration.

President Cordeiro added that this Political Bureau meeting had been due to take place in Noord-Holland, and regretted that, along with the meeting which should have been held in March in Cornwall, it had had to be cancelled. He thanked Councillors Cees Loggen (Noord-Holland) and Julian German (Cornwall) for their understanding and support.

He then outlined the agenda and addressed the first, very important, item: the EU budget. Following the European Commission’s announcement of its proposed Recovery Plan in May, CPMR had expressed its support for this proposal in a press release. He hoped that this meeting would adopt a Declaration aimed at the European Summit on 19 June 2020. He added that the budget proposal was both bold and ambitious, and that the REACT-EU instrument had been designed to take account of the highly differentiated impacts of the COVID-19 crisis across regions and territories. It provided support for the recovery and for improved cohesion in the EU territories. CPMR would draw up specific proposals for a fair and equitable recovery that did not compromise the Green Deal.

He also emphasised the role of the Regions, which are and always will be at the heart of European policy developments. The Regions want to see a strong territorial dimension and the involvement of regional authorities in the designing and implementation of investment plans. The Regions are also Europe’s partners, and can and will deliver social, economic and territorial cohesion post-COVID-19. He ended by underlining the strategic context in which this meeting was taking place: the debate on the future of the European budget.

Lastly, President Cordeiro asked the participants to observe a minute’s silence in memory of the victims of COVID-19.

He then invited the participants to move ahead with the first session of the meeting, on the EU budget, and welcomed the speakers.

NB: The following two points were put to the vote after session 1:

The minutes of the Political Bureau meeting in Palermo (17 October 2019) were unanimously adopted.

The Political Bureau approved the agenda for the present meeting.

SESSION 1: THE FUTURE OF THE EU BUDGET

Younous Omarjee, MEP, Chair of the European Parliament’s REGI Committee, paid tribute to the CPMR’s analyses and the excellent collaborative relations in place to monitor the negotiations on the future Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) post-2020. The European Union is living through a crucial time; the current situation is putting European solidarity – so important for the

survival of the European project – to the test. The responses – both regulatory and regarding the EU budget – must imperatively take account of the different aspects such as the sectors and the regions that have been so badly affected.

The European Parliament has welcomed with satisfaction the proposal for the next MFF and the ambitious measures presented by the European Commission to tackle the consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic. Concerns remain, however, about the future of regional policy.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (with an allocation of €560 billion) is higher than the Cohesion Policy budget, whereas in the proposal for the future MFF the budget allocated to Cohesion Policy risks being reduced (a reduction of more than €34 billion is forecast). Added to this, there are significant reductions in the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). Although the budgetary increase was satisfactory, Mr Omarjee nonetheless warned that the implementation deadlines were very short; he called for the programmes to be deployed over a full programming year.

In addition, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the €55 billion REACT-EU initiative (Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe) fall outside the principle that governs Cohesion Policy: that governance and competence must be attributed to the regions. The European Parliament sees this as the thin end of the wedge that could open the door to renationalisation of the objectives of regional policy.

The EP, in the context of its role as co-legislator, guarantees its support for the regions and will be vigilant regarding a fair distribution of funding. He would make sure this proposal was corrected, notably to reintroduce fair principles on funding allocation into the REACT-EU so that no region feels forgotten or left to one side. One of Parliament's units is working specifically on the application of these principles. He supported the creation of new resources to finance the EU's new priorities. It is imperative that the co-decision procedure be applied, in spite of the urgency of the measures to be implemented to tackle the crisis. The local and regional levels must take part, alongside Member States, in decisions taken to implement European solidarity.

Mr Omarjee welcomed Commissioner Ferreira's announcement of a specific envelope for the outermost regions. We need to be sure, however, that this is really an additional envelope.

Regarding the Just Transition Fund, this is currently being closely examined and a significant number of amendments have already been submitted. Parliament hopes it will be adopted before the end of 2020.

Enrico Rossi, Vice-President of CPMR and President of Tuscany Region, welcomed the fresh financing, the funding method and the reimbursement arrangements proposed in the new Recovery Plan announced by the EC at the end of May. This would enable an exceptional volume of investment to be mobilised in all the European countries, in particular those the most affected by the crisis. He also welcomed the proposal to create new own resources.

He welcomed the possibility of combining the investments with the EU's new environmental and climate priorities, demonstrated by the creation of the Just Transition Fund. He hoped that the number of geographical areas to benefit from the Fund would increase in line with the increase in the budget.

By allocating €55 billion to the operational programmes via REACT-EU, the EC had paid particular attention to the role attributed to Cohesion Policy. However, to ensure the full success of this recovery plan, which depends on a multitude of factors, the Council and Parliament need to incorporate certain elements that are missing from the current proposal: a strong territorial dimension and criteria for allocating resources under the Recovery and Resilience Facility and REACT-EU that take account of the local and regional levels. The contribution of the regions is crucial for identifying investment needs as well as managing operations. A territorial approach

makes investment more effective. The partnership principle and multi-level governance should also apply to the Recovery and Resilience Facility. The choice of the Commission's proposals in REACT-EU, to allocate resources only to the States, risks penalising certain programmes or regions particularly badly hit by the pandemic.

He underlined the crucial importance of investment to finance large projects and mobilise significant public investment, for major public building works for example. The Commission has an opportunity to strengthen the role that Cohesion Policy should play in supporting policies related to the "green" recovery, thanks to the provisions of the Green Deal and a "green economic recovery".

With regard to the timeline, it is important that Member States and the European Parliament reach agreement as soon as possible, to avoid any overlap or a situation in which the regions become submerged by the volume of programmes, otherwise the resources will arrive too late and the Commission's efforts will have been in vain.

Debate with the members of the Political Bureau

Loïc Chesnais-Girard, President of the Regional Council of Brittany, highlighted the need to position the regions on the implementation of the recovery funds. He emphasised the risk that regions might not have a role in the funding allocation and on the definition of priorities, as the operational programmes will be national ones. Mr Chesnais-Girard urged participants not to forget regions such as Brittany and economic sectors affected by Brexit, and called for a specific economic allocation and provisions for those regions.

Annika Sandström, Chair of Stockholm County Council, stated that a coherent strategy was needed at EU level and that the proposed €750 billion was a good starting point from the European Commission's side. She emphasised the strong need to support enterprises and SMEs so they could continue their activities and so the economy could recover well. In this sense, it is surprising that the criteria for allocating funds are not based on regional data. The Recovery Funds need to be guided by regional needs and regions need to be involved in the definition of recovery plans.

Gilles Simeoni, President of the Islands Commission and President of the Executive Council of Corsica, made a plea for European solidarity between territories and expressed that this solidarity must be displayed in financial and budgetary terms. Mr Simeoni called for greater involvement of the regions in the implementations of funds and asked for the support of the European Parliament to correct the lack of involvement in the Regulations. He emphasised that no matter the degree of regional autonomy, regions could not be excluded from the definition and implementation of the funds. He was concerned about the lack of an island dimension in the Recovery Instrument, considering the indisputable economic consequences of the crisis on the islands. He asked that islands benefit from the same specific provisions as for the outermost regions.

Francisco Martin, CPMR Vice-President for Transport & Accessibility and Minister of Innovation, Industry, Trade and Transport of the Government of Cantabria, asked the European Commission whether there was a guarantee that the European regions would be involved in defining the recovery plan in their Member States, and whether the transport sector would be taken into consideration as an investment sector in the recovery plan.

Andrea Jakova, Director for International Affairs at Shkodra Region, asked for the collaboration of the regions to reinforce the partnership with the Western Balkans via the new Recovery Fund in favour of European territorial cooperation, and particularly with those regions from Member States that are in the process of accession such as Albania.

George Alexakis, Vice-Governor of Crete Region and CPMR Vice-President for Maritime Affairs, asked the European Commission why the funds allocated under Cohesion Policy had been reduced, and called for ideas to be developed to ensure a more active participation of Regions in the Recovery Fund.

Mohamed Sidi, Vice-President of the Departmental Council of Mayotte, referred to the consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak on the outermost regions and said that the Recovery Instrument needed to consider the long-term impact of the outbreak for the outermost regions and make available an additional economic envelope. In relation to the MFF 2021-2027, Mayotte welcomed the package presented by the European Commission and pointed out the need to set an 80% co-financing rate for outermost regions, but was concerned about plans to nationalise certain EU programmes.

Marc Lemaître, DG REGIO Director General-European Commission, presented the elements that shape the European Commission proposal on the EU Recovery Instrument “Next Generation EU”, specifically those linked to Cohesion Policy.

On the budget allocations, Mr Lemaître emphasised that on top of the Cohesion Policy budget allocated via the MFF 2021-2027 there would be an additional €100 billion approximately under shared management via the Recovery Instrument (€55 billion from REACT-EU, €32.3 billion for the Just Transition Fund and €10 billion after the mid-term review and technical adjustment).

Mr Lemaître asked for a courageous agreement in the European Council summit in July endorsing the level of ambition shown by the European Commission. In order to press ahead, agreements on the sectorial legislative proposals are needed in the autumn. He emphasised the role that REACT-EU may have to demonstrate that Cohesion Policy is the right response to a huge emergency, as it would be the only instrument offering support in 2020.

On the allocation methodology for REACT-EU to address the costs of the crisis, Mr Lemaître justified the different methodology used compared to that for Cohesion Policy. He explained that the establishment of national allocation is based on national data in order to have immediate harmonised data in the statistics. He pointed out that an additional allocation for outermost regions was foreseen.

Mr Lemaître referred to the need for rapid implementation and agreements under Cohesion Policy. As soon as there is a European Council agreement, the European Commission will press ahead with the national authorities to modify the operational programmes before the end of the year. On the possible consideration that there is a tendency to nationalise Cohesion Policy, he reiterated that the European Commission would ensure the proper implication of the different level of public authorities and the implementation of the partnership principle.

Adoption of the Political Statement on the EU Recovery Plan

The CPMR Political Bureau unanimously adopted the [CPMR Political Statement](#) in view of the 19 June 2020 European Council summit.

SESSION 2: UPDATES AND OUTLOOKS FOR CPMR POLICY AREAS AND GEOGRAPHICAL COMMISSIONS

Eleni Marianou, Secretary General of the CPMR, introduced the session by thanking participants for the interesting debate in session 1 and President Vasco Cordeiro for his chairmanship. She outlined the aim of the session: to give a brief update on the work undertaken by the CPMR since the last Political Bureau in Donegal in June 2019.

Ms Marianou recalled the commitment of the CPMR to accompanying its Member Regions throughout the crisis and providing them with specific actions, advice and analyses on the impact of the pandemic and the impact it has (had) on the European policy agenda. The CPMR has tried to work alongside its Member Regions and has helped to analyse proposals from the Commission, such as the MFF, the Recovery Plan or the New Pact on Asylum and Migration. The [letter](#) recalling the need for urgent adoption of the Pact, signed by 20 Presidents of Regions, is one of the many examples of the CPMR's commitment to keep working amid these unprecedented times.

Update on CPMR policy areas

➤ Accessibility & Transport

Francisco Martín Gallego, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Trade and Transport, Government of Cantabria and CPMR Vice-President for Transport, stressed the need for solidarity during these times of crisis, recalling the importance that transport has in uniting us and bringing us closer. He emphasised the major impact of COVID-19 on mobility and paid tribute to transport sector workers.

In Cantabria, the regional government has adopted measures to keep companies afloat and help them maintain employment, while imposing strict health measures. Mr Martín Gallego stressed the need for these measures to remain transitional and to ensure a stable framework for economic activities to restart. He highlighted the role of the CPMR in pursuing the Region's strategic objectives.

Vice-President Gallego then presented the legislative dossiers which the CPMR has been working on. Following the adoption of its [policy position](#) on transport at the last General Assembly in Palermo, the CPMR has been presenting the document to the European institutions to influence the legislative process on the Trans-European Network for Transport. The CPMR will keep working on this matter to make sure the new legislative proposal, when published in June 2021, meets its expectations. The CPMR also met with the coordinator of the Motorways of the Seas, stressing the need to address the challenges of peripheral maritime regions in terms of accessibility.

Furthermore, Mr Martín Gallego pointed out the absence of maritime transborder points in the 'green lanes' put in place by the European Commission to alleviate the immediate effects of the health crisis on the transport sector, a proof of the need to better address the strategic importance of maritime transport. The CPMR has also been monitoring COVID-19-induced developments in the aviation sector, so as to ensure no peripheral, island or outermost region is left with damaged connectivity.

Looking to the future, Mr Martín Gallego insisted on the importance of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) to ramp up investments in the green and digital agendas, even though its funding remains insufficient given the challenges at stake. He shared his concerns about the involvement of Regions in the drafting of the Recovery Plans, as well as on whether the transport sector would be identified as a priority area to invest in. Vice-President Gallego underlined the importance of ensuring synergies between transport, climate and energy policies, so that Regions in Europe are provided with an efficient and decarbonised transport system that connects us all.

A statement, which will be submitted to the Political Bureau for written approval, has been prepared reminding the European institutions that innovative transport policies, if accompanied by appropriate industrial support, have the potential to create local jobs while ensuring accessibility and climate-neutrality for European regions.

➤ Maritimes Affairs

George Alexakis, Vice-Governor, Region Crete (Greece) and CPMR Vice-President for Maritime Affairs, highlighted the importance of not only the green, but also the blue recovery of our coastal territories. He acknowledged that the maritime sectors have been particularly badly hit by confinement measures taken to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Fisheries and Aquaculture sectors have suffered from a loss of demand and low prices; critical infrastructure such as ports has been under a lot of strain, impacting European's value chains; coastal and maritime tourism is suffering from enormous economic losses; and maritime industries, such as shipbuilding and offshore energies, are severely hit as activities and investments are postponed.

In this context he provided details of a number of successful initiatives carried out by the CPMR.

- The Fisheries and Aquaculture Working Group has contributed to setting up an adapted framework of EU emergency measures for fisheries and aquaculture. A letter was sent to Commissioner Sinkevicius, the European Parliament and the Council representatives on 24 March 2020 conveying the CPMR's amendments to the Regulation of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund 2014-2020. All suggestions were taken on board in a second package of emergency measures agreed by the EU institutions in April 2020. He congratulated those involved for their excellent lobbying work.
- On 29 May 2020, a CPMR delegation including representatives from Galicia, Pays de la Loire, Sicily, Tulcea, Stockholm and Flevoland met online with Pierre Karleskind MEP and DG MARE to share how these emergency measures were implemented in the territories, and to express visions regarding the future programming period and the recovery of the sectors.
- The CPMR will continue to influence the EMFF 2021-2027 negotiations over the next period. It will also influence the Revision of State Aids for fisheries and aquaculture planned in 2021, and monitor the Brexit negotiations in which fisheries remain a major stumbling block.
- The CPMR has worked with the SEARica Intergroup at the European Parliament to highlight the impact of COVID-19 on maritime sectors including maritime industries. It has also supported MEPs in developing a SEARica Declaration on COVID-19 to support the maritime sectors, as published on 21 April 2020. Thanks to this Declaration, the SEARica Intergroup met Commissioner Sinkevicius on 19 May. As a follow-up, the CPMR will organise an online SEARica seminar "Towards sustainable tourism in the coastal regions of Europe" on 7 July 2020, and in line with its work on the new EU Industrial Strategy, the CPMR will also work on a SEARica seminar on the recovery of the Maritime Industries, which will be organised during the 2nd semester of 2020.

He explained to participants that Pays de la Loire Region is candidate to lead the CPMR Fisheries and Aquaculture Working Group. The application will be submitted to the vote of the Political Bureau during this meeting. He concluded by thanking everyone for their active collaboration in supporting coastal economies, despite the difficult context. Concrete results have been achieved thanks to the great adaptability of our working methods.

➤ Climate & Energy

Cees Loggen, Regional Minister of Noord-Holland (NL) and CPMR Vice-President for Climate & Energy, opened his speech by pointing out that the Bureau should have been taking place in his Region. Unfortunately, due to the health situation, all the Political Bureau members were in front of a screen, and that was where he was also delivering his presentation from. Nevertheless, he hoped to welcome the members of the Political Bureau to his region when the situation allowed.

He highlighted the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 on economies, territories, and people all over the world. The impact of the pandemic and the impact of climate change are comparable: both are cross-border and affect all people, all policy fields, all economic sectors. Therefore, we need to work together in all sector and policies.

The pandemic is challenging Europe and we must already start to build back, to repair, and to make sure that we grow stronger together to deliver a Europe that is green, digital, resilient and competitive. We need to ensure that no one is left behind in the recovery from COVID-19, but also in the transition to a climate-neutral continent.

The European Commission's Recovery Plan is a good start and the CPMR also welcomes that the European Green Deal will, as President von der Leyen said, be the driving force of the EU's long-term growth strategy and of the recovery. CPMR will ensure a concrete involvement of its Member Regions in the European Green Deal and will fight for a fair, adequately funded, and balanced transition towards a climate-neutral continent by 2050.

That is why CPMR will contribute to the new EU Adaptation Strategy and will underline how peripheral and maritime regions are increasingly faced with the impacts of climate change. The CPMR will ask for the new EU Adaptation Strategy to pay more attention to the regional level and support the actions of maritime and peripheral regions. In this context, the CPMR has launched the "Regions Act!" initiative to which Regions are invited to contribute if they have not already done so. Our initiative aims at showing EU decision-makers that Regions are already contributing to the objectives of the European Green Deal through mitigation and adaptation strategies and policies, through the use of Cohesion Policy, and through regional investments.

The increased budget for the Just Transition Fund is also a good sign from the European Commission. All regions, all territories in Europe should be able to grasp the benefits of the ecological transition in terms of economic growth, jobs, and health, as the CPMR has been advocating.

However, the European Commission proposals should only be a start, a piece of the puzzle to construct a prosperous, climate-neutral Europe. This goal can only be achieved if the EU commits to an ambitious climate policy not only in the long-term, but also in the next years, by increasing the reduction of greenhouse gas emission to at least 55% with as its core a territorial approach.

Maritime, peripheral, and outermost regions and islands have an important role in delivering the energy transition. They can be innovation labs for the development of renewables, in particular in the field of marine renewable energy. The CPMR will scrutinise the upcoming EU Offshore Renewable Energy Strategy in order to ensure a territorial approach, and to make sure that the role of the regions is recognised.

Cees Loggen recalled that CPMR Member Regions were already suffering the impacts of climate change and contributing to the European Green Deal objectives. By making the Regions' voice heard, in particular by acting and leading by example, they must ensure that the EU cannot do without them in delivering a prosperous, climate-neutral and resilient Europe.

➤ **Neighbourhood Policy**

Dumitru Mergeani, Vice-President of Tulcea County Council (Romania), on behalf of Mr Horia Teodorescu, President of Tulcea County Council and CPMR Vice-President responsible for Neighbourhood Policy, stressed that, regarding the Eastern Partnership, the CPMR welcomed the conclusions on the Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020, approved last May by the Council of the European Union, reaffirming the importance of including local and regional authorities as well as of creating synergies with other relevant EU policies and strategies towards the joint commitment to building a common area of shared democracy, prosperity and stability.

Mr Mergeani added that in the Black Sea region the CPMR was also active in efforts aiming to stimulate the discussion on the future of the EU Black Sea Synergy initiative in the short and medium term. He underlined the CPMR's contribution to the "Black Sea Synergy: the way forward" Policy Paper, placing particular emphasis on the fields of tourism and culture, education, transport, and energy. This Policy Paper remains open to further feedback.

Mr Mergeani said that as for the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and in particular the Western Balkans, the CPMR welcomed the results of the EU-Western Balkans summit, held last May in Zagreb, President von der Leyen's statement that "the Western Balkans belong in the EU", and the EU's determination to strengthen its support for the region's political, economic, and social transformation.

As for the Mediterranean region and South Neighbourhood, and foreseeing the elaboration and implementation of new instruments (NDICI, ETC programmes) over the coming programming period 2021-2027, Mr Mergeani said that it remained clear that a space for local and regional authorities in the governance of these dynamics needed to be better defined. In this sense, the Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance, being a network of 'local and regional authorities networks' with members from the three shores of the basin, should be considered a relevant tool to ensure that multi-level governance of cooperation is fully implemented, and that projects results coming from Cohesion Policy programmes and funds are fully taken on board by the territories. Lastly, synergies between the various initiatives (WESTMED), strategies (EUSAIR), cooperation programmes (Interreg MED, ENI CBC Med) and multi-lateral players (Union for the Mediterranean, ARLEM, etc.) should continue to be strengthened, ensuring a multi-level governance approach and aiming at the further integration of the Mediterranean basin as a whole.

➤ Migration

Annika Annerby Jansson, Rapporteur of the CPMR Task Force Migration and President of Region Skåne (Sweden) made the following points.

The main highlight of 2020 is the launch of the **New Pact on Migration and Asylum**, which has been postponed until the end of June 2020¹ because of the COVID-19 situation. Among other things the Pact seeks to ensure better coordination between the internal and external dimensions of EU migration and asylum policies, and introduce a system based on solidarity and responsibility to manage migration flows. The reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) is a particularly difficult topic, especially concerning the Dublin Regulation: the key issue will be whether EU Member States can agree to a mandatory relocation mechanism, which some governments have been reluctant to do in the past. Some recent proposals circulating mentioned new forms of solidarity in addition to relocation (financial or operational), so all Member States can make meaningful contributions.

Regarding the **impact of the COVID crisis on refugees and migrants**, 20 Presidents of CPMR member regions expressed their concerns in a [letter to EU institutions](#) on 9 April. These vulnerable populations are at risk of further isolation and marginalisation, as they face crowded living conditions in camps and reception centres as well as delays in processing asylum applications. Regional authorities play a part in the response through their own outreach activities to migrant and refugee populations. In the same letter, we urged that the New Pact be adopted without delay.

¹ Please note it was later indicated by the European Commission that the New Pact on Migration and Asylum will not be presented before an agreement on post-2020 EU budget is reached, source: [Politico](#).

A **response from Commissioner Ylva Johansson** on behalf of the President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, was received on 2 June. She acknowledged the support regions provide both in times of crisis and in the longer term as regards integration efforts.

The CPMR and the voluntary regions of our [Migration Task Force](#) are lobbying to **ensure that the needs and added value of Regions are taken into account in the New Pact**, with regard to both internal and external EU migration policies. The following actions are foreseen once the Pact is unveiled:

- analysis and reactions with an immediate press release;
- short policy position;
- high level online meeting with EU institutions (presence of DG HOME with Commissioner Johansson and a representative of the European Parliament). In view of the positive response from Commissioner Johansson to our letter, we are hopeful about the possibilities of furthering our collaboration this way.

Other planned activities on migration include:

- **2021-2027 MFF negotiations and proposed funding regulations:** the CPMR is monitoring developments on the future funding instruments available to regions for migration-related actions (EU structural and investment funds including ERDF and ESF+, Asylum and Migration Fund, Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument) to ensure that they provide adequate support.
- Contribution to the **consultation** ahead of the expected publication of the **Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion** by the European Commission in the autumn.
- **REGIN Project (Regions for Migrants & Refugees Integration):** this project, led by the CPMR and launched in February 2020, will further develop actions to improve policy performance and build capacities. The project is funded by the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) under a call targeted specifically at regional and local authorities. Six CPMR member regions are involved in the project consortium (Azores, Campania, Catalonia, Murcia, Puglia, and Skåne). Through the project, these regions will be testing **innovative integration actions** and the CPMR will be able to share and disseminate results to other European regions notably through the Migration Task Force.
- **Promotion of regional actions targeted at migrants and refugees** through continued collaboration with the **Committee of the Regions' "Cities and Regions for Integration" initiative** and other external partners. Members are encouraged to give visibility to their actions by posting their initiatives on the [European Web Site for Integration \(EWSI\)](#) which also has a special section on COVID-19.
- Opportunities for involvement in **relevant EU project proposals**.

Eleni Marianou wrapped up this first part of the session stressing how active the CPMR has remained over the past months across all policy areas. She briefly summarised what was said by CPMR Vice-Presidents and gave the floor to the Geographical Commissions' Presidencies.

Update on the activities of the CPMR Geographical Commissions

➤ Atlantic Arc Commission

Vanessa Charbonneau, Vice-President of Pays de la Loire Region (France), presidency of the Atlantic Arc Commission, said she hoped they would soon be able to meet again other than via a screen. She outlined the priorities of the Atlantic Arc Commission, first recalling the debate on the crisis provoked by COVID-19 and the measures taken by the European institutions in response and

to help the Regions. She underlined however that the Atlantic Regions found themselves facing a two-fold economic crisis, due to COVID-19 and Brexit. Certain sectors such as tourism, transport or fisheries will be impacted twice over. A number of the measures proposed by the European Commission could quite easily be broadened and reproduced to help these sectors and the regions hardest hit by Brexit, for example by raising the ceiling threshold for State aid. The Atlantic Arc Commission has written to Commissioner Ferreira (in charge of Cohesion and Reforms) highlighting these concerns and calling for this twin challenge to be recognised when the post-COVID-19 recovery mechanisms are being drawn up. The European Parliament has also been alerted to the problem, in particular by Pays de la Loire and Galicia, at a political meeting which took place online on 29 April.

Ms Charbonneau then detailed the Atlantic Arc Commission's main upcoming meetings, in particular the General Assembly which would take place online on 26 June 2020. A high level political debate will be organised with Commissioner Ferreira on the impacts of COVID-19 in the Atlantic Arc area. A discussion will then be launched on the best way to move forward to foster the recovery and look at how to best help the Regions and sectors most impacted by Brexit.

Feedback from the Tourism Working Group will be voted on at this Assembly, and there will be an update on the recovery following the COVID-19 crisis. There would also be a vote on the policy recommendations to improve innovation in the seafood sector and analyse the extent to which innovation can play a role in tackling the crisis. These recommendations will be a form of response to the EU's recently published "Farm to Fork" strategy.

During the second half of 2020 a new presidency of the Atlantic Arc Commission will be elected, and nominations made for the recently set up Political Steering Group. At the end of November 2020, the Atlantic Arc Commission's technical working groups, including on marine renewable energies, transport, maritime skills, and cooperation with third countries, will meet in Nouvelle Aquitaine Region.

Lastly, concerning the Atlantic Arc Commission's involvement in projects, Ms Charbonneau said that the Atlantic Arc Commission was currently taking part in two European projects: SAFER on innovation in the seafood sector, and CleanAtlantic on the issue of marine litter. There are also plans to set up a consortium to respond to a DG MARE call for projects on the specific topic of "Developing a blue accelerator scheme for the Atlantic ports". A cooperation project on aquaculture training – a very important sector for the Atlantic economies – is also envisaged.

➤ **Balkan & Black Sea Commission**

Valentin Moldoveanu, Tulcea County Councillor (Romania) and Acting President of the BBSC, said that the BBSC continued to welcome new members from both the Balkans and the Black Sea and to work on common priorities and challenges, such as brain drain and unemployment, in order to create societies that benefit from policies aimed at improving the situation of people, economies, wellbeing, and all that makes life positive in the area.

Regarding the Balkans, the BBSC welcomes President von der Leyen's statement that "the Western Balkans belong in the EU". Together with its members, and mainly Tirana Regional Council, it is assessing new collaboration opportunities with possible members from different Western Balkan countries. The "AI-NURECC PLUS" initiative and the "Cultural and Creative Regional Ecosystems" (CCRE-S3) proposal for a new thematic area (EU Smart Specialisation Platform) will be the BBSC's main means to promote collaboration in the region.

As for the wider Black Sea region, Mr Moldoveanu stressed that the BBSC is currently involved in the main meetings of the "Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea" (Black Sea SRIA) and the "Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea". The BBSC also contributes to joint

efforts such as the Policy Paper on Black Sea Synergy (entitled “Black Sea Synergy: the way forward”) aiming to stimulate discussion on the future of Black Sea Synergy in the short and medium term with particular emphasis on the fields of tourism and culture, education, transport, and energy. Together with its new members in Georgia and Ukraine the BBSC is also planning to work on common priorities for the Eastern Partnership.

Regarding the future priorities and perspectives for 2020 and beyond, the main focus of the BBSC is to finalise its draft Action Plan for the 2021-2023 period to be adopted by the next BBSC General Assembly. Priority will be given to main policies in the area and cooperation projects.

To this end, the BBSC will benefit from the EU projects that will be possibly approved by then and the Memoranda of Understanding and agreements already in place with the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Black Sea Association of Maritime Institutions (BSAMI), and the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS). The BBSC is also exploring the possibility of drawing up MoUs with other key organisations active in the Western Balkans.

➤ Baltic Sea Commission

Jari Nahkanen, President of the Baltic Sea Commission and Member of the Board of Oulu Region (Finland) informed participants that the Baltic Sea Commission has not had a joint discussion on the situation in BSC regions and countries. In Finland, as in other countries, there are restrictions, and the local authorities are responsible for organising health care, which is the main focus of politicians. He acknowledged that the coronavirus crisis would be followed by an economic crisis, an unemployment crisis and a climate crisis, and also possibly a crisis of trust. It is important to work together, as well as being the voices in the current discussion on a new EU, to keep our strong promise to push back the climate crisis. He stressed that while the coronavirus has had more impact on some regions than others, the current crisis is a matter for concern for everyone. He mentioned that the role of the CPMR would be even more important from the perspective of our regions and he thanked the CPMR staff for their high level of production despite the extraordinary circumstances, which has allowed the regions to follow and influence negotiations. He stated that it was not possible to go “back to normal” but the crisis should be used as an opportunity to transform and improve. He concluded by stating that although the BSC was not operating as normal, meetings were being held online, and the General Assembly has been postponed until October.

➤ Intermediterranean Commission

Guillaume Cros, Interim President of the Intermediterranean Commission and Vice-President of Occitanie Region (France), recalled the context of the current crisis for the members of the Intermediterranean Commission. It was a sudden and unprecedented crisis; however it “should not lead us to become closed-in on ourselves, but to be open to new avenues of solidarity and cooperation”. It had been necessary to reschedule a number of activities, but most of the initiatives launched had been continued. For example, on the topic of youth and citizenship, under the lead of Lazio Region (Italy) preparations were under way for the official launch of a Mediterranean Youth Council at the end of the year. Guillaume Cros said that young people’s priorities appeared to be sustainable development, the development of projects in the Mediterranean, training, and employment.

The Intermediterranean Commission has also continued its work on sustainable tourism. The world’s top tourism destination, the Mediterranean welcomes more than 300 million visitors each year. Tourism is essential for the economy, but can sometimes pose a threat to natural or cultural heritage. The COVID-19 crisis could be an opportunity for the Mediterranean regions to adapt to changing travel and tourism behaviours and, in the medium and long term, propose a more

sustainable and responsible form of tourism. Certain Regions had been involved in cooperation projects on sustainable tourism even before the COVID-19 crisis, but the Intermediterranean Commission has decided to launch a study on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on this sector. In Occitanie, small local shops and businesses have received support from the OCCAL facility to help restart their businesses. In the Region of Valencia, a project is envisaged to identify and monitor the propagation and evolution of pandemics by analysing waste water. Lastly, the member regions of the Intermediterranean Commission have continued discussions in the MedCoopAlliance (a network linking the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission, the Adriatic-Ionian Euroregion, MedCities, the Pyrénées-Méditerranée Euroregion and the Latin Arc) on the design of new European territorial cooperation programmes for the 2021-2027 period to strengthen multi-level governance. The members of the MedCoopAlliance issued a joint Declaration calling on the EU to allocate more resources and to devote programmes to specifically support regional and local authorities, while increasing coordination. Finally, the European Green Deal and Sustainable Development Goals remain more pertinent than ever and should guide the Intermediterranean Commission's roadmap towards new scenarios.

He concluded by saying that the Regions of the Intermediterranean Commission were convinced that thanks to the initiatives taken at multiple levels solutions would be found to overcome this crisis. We need to continue discuss and share information on the recovery plans set up for the benefit of our territories. Solidarity and the work carried out jointly by its regions during this period of economic, social and climate crisis showed they shared a determination to work together to find new solutions to adapt to a more resilient way of life. This indicated the importance and necessity of European cooperation in tackling the challenges ahead.

➤ Islands Commission

Gilles Simeoni, President of the Islands Commission and President of the Executive Council of Corsica (France), began by saying that everyone had been looking forward to the General Assembly in the Azores in April, but that the crisis provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic had forced the Islands Commission to cancel this event.

The Secretariat of the Islands Commission is monitoring developments in the health situation and will assess whether the conditions are in place to allow a physical meeting of the members of the Islands Commission in autumn 2020. If this is not possible, the presidency is looking into the possibility of organising an online event, probably in October, so that members can discuss the state of play on the debate on the MFF 2021-2027 and the Recovery plan.

In parallel, the Islands Commission is continuing, in spite of the conditions, to work on its priority policy areas: Cohesion Policy, transport and accessibility, decarbonisation of island economies and energy transition, and sustainable tourism. On this last point, the President commented that sustainable tourism was a concern shared by several of our Commissions and regions. He underlined however that island regions, and in particular those with an important tourism sector, including the Mediterranean islands, faced a specific problem. Beyond the peak of the epidemic, reconciling attractiveness with health security as part of a global vision of sustainable tourism will be a condition for success in the months ahead. Specific thought needs to be given to this issue and responses found to restore trust in the destination. This is a key challenge if we want our development policies in this field to succeed.

The President briefly mentioned the Island Commission's call for a specific European strategy for the islands, a green paper, the principle of which had been adopted in Corfu in March 2019, a specific budgetary support. On this subject, he welcomed the "safety net" granted to the outermost islands, the principle of which should be extended to all island regions.

He underlined that the Islands Commission:

- is closely monitoring the development of the EU's "Clean energy for the EU islands" initiative, a major challenge for our territories;
- has strengthened the informal dialogue with DG MOVE and DG COMP on the socioeconomic repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis, which has hit the islands very hard, notably with regard to state aid for maritime and air transport and thus the connectivity of our territories with mainland Europe;
- supports the activities of SEARICA by contributing to the initiatives of the Vice-President in charge of islands, François Alfonsi MEP, and continues to work in a structured and collaborative way with Younous Omarjee MEP.

He concluded by indicating that these were some, but not all, of the many areas in which the Islands Commission was trying to be really constructive and obtain answers. However, although our proposals are interesting and justified we often have difficulty in obtaining direct and detailed answers, notably from the European Commission. This was something he regretted.

➤ North Sea Commission

Kerstin Brunnström, President of the North Sea Commission and Councillor-Region Västra Götaland (Sweden), spoke about the NSC's transition to online meetings as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. She described this as mainly successful; not travelling saves time, money and the environment. However, the format is best for webinars and small meetings of people who already know each other. The NSC will continue to hold online meetings, but these will never completely replace physical meetings, which are necessary for trust and relationship-building.

She talked about the new North Sea Region 2030 strategy, to be adopted at the Annual Business Meeting later this year. The new strategy has a strong focus on sustainability and goes hand in hand with the EU's Green Deal and the UN's SDGs with its four priority areas:

- A productive and sustainable North Sea, including questions related to the marine environment, maritime spatial planning, fisheries/aquaculture and the blue economy
- A climate-neutral North Sea Region with more renewable energy, better energy efficiency, better adaptation to climate change and development on carbon capture and storage
- A connected North Sea Region with good transnational accessibility, clean and inclusive transport and intelligent transport solutions
- A smart North Sea Region with a focus on smart specialisation, skills/mobility and circular use of resources.

Another ongoing process in the NSC is to develop a model for youth participation.

Ms Brunnström also mentioned the challenges of Brexit in the North Sea Region for member regions in the UK as well as in EU27 and Norway.

SESSION 3: FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

- ✓ **Financial issues** by **Mrs Gunn Marit Helgesen**, 1st Vice-President and Treasurer of the CPMR

2019 annual report

The Treasurer was pleased to announce a positive result of €224,942.

Five new regions joined in 2019: Satakunta (Finland), Collectivité de Saint-Martin (France), Jämtland (Sweden), Thessalia (Greece) and Valcea (Romania). Two regions withdrew membership: Orkney (UK) and Molise (Italy).

The CPMR cash flow, amounting to €1,453,860, remains broadly the same as at 31/12/2018.

The Treasurer proposed allocating the 2019 surplus to the CPMR's Accumulated Fund.

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

Mr Sevestre informed the meeting that the auditors had found no deficiency in internal control that needed to be communicated to the Political Bureau, and no significant misstatement that had not been corrected in the accounts presented. He specified that the Baltic Sea and North Sea Commissions accounting elements had been integrated into the CPMR consolidated accounts.

On this basis, and after validation by the Political Bureau, Mazars should be in a position to provide an unqualified audit certificate for the Association's 2019 accounts.

The accounts were unanimously approved.

Update on the implementation of the 2020 budget (for information)

At this stage of the year, forecast income and expenditure are in balance.

- Two new members have joined CPMR: Kherson (Ukraine) and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti (Georgia).
- Departure of Podlaskie (Poland).
- Two Regions were able to pay their outstanding dues (Calabria and Molise).
- Estimation of €1,350,451 from projects subsidies and from contracts.
- Linked to activities generated by the new projects, CPMR is recruiting on fixed term contracts in order to avoid too much rigidity in the staff costs item.

Presentation of the 2021 draft budget (for information)

It is too early to draw up a precise table for the 2021 budget, given that:

- The 2021 budget is prepared in advance in order to assess resource needs and examine possible new sources of revenues or the potential cuts we need to make so as to present a balanced budget to the vote of the General Assembly in October 2020.
- The proposal includes an increase of 1.30% in CPMR fees, corresponding to the 2019 annual average inflation rate of Belgium and France.
- Several EU projects will come to an end during 2020 and new projects have been submitted for which we will have the result of the evaluation before the General Assembly.
- Our cash situation at the beginning of this year is healthy. The good results of 2019 contribute to this situation.

Before giving the floor to the Secretary General for a presentation of the administrative questions, **President Cordeiro** informed the members of the Political Bureau that he did not intend to stand for election for a fourth term of office as President of CPMR. He took the opportunity of this announcement to thank the members for the trust, understanding, collaboration and generosity they had demonstrated, and to thank the Secretary General and CPMR staff for all their hard work.

Eleni Marianou, Gunn Marit Helgesen, Cees Loggen and Georges Alexakis spoke in turn to warmly thank President Cordeiro, on behalf of everyone, for the decisive role he had played in CPMR throughout his terms in office.

President Cordeiro, deeply touched by these kind words, said that he would remain an active member of CPMR, and once again paid tribute to the Secretary General and the staff of CPMR who kept the organisation running smoothly.

Eleni Marianou said that President Cordeiro would be made an honorary Member of the Political Bureau at the end of October 2020 following the election of the new President of CPMR. This title, if he accepts it, is conferred upon him as a former President of the Association for as long he holds a regional mandate (Article 7.2 of the Statutes).

The Secretary General returned to the agenda to address the more administrative questions.

✓ New CPMR Rules of Procedure (distributed for information)

The Secretary General thanked the members of the Political Bureau for their contributions, compromises and amendments that had resulted in the final version of these new Rules of Procedure which could now come into operation. The consultation by written procedure had enabled the document to be approved by the members of the Political Bureau on 26 May 2020.

✓ Presentation of the Terms of Reference of the CPMR Task Force on gender equality

The Secretary General reminded members that this Task Force was an initiative of the Pays Basque Region and that its Terms of Reference, which had been sent to members of the Political Bureau, were submitted for approval.

The Terms of Reference were unanimously approved.

✓ Presentation of Pays de la Loire's candidature to chair the CPMR Fisheries & Aquaculture working group

The candidature Pays de la Loire Region was unanimously accepted.

✓ Procedure for the election of the President of CPMR and renewal of the CPMR Political Bureau / Information about the next CPMR General Assembly (28/30 October 2020, Crete-Greece)

Eleni Marianou wished to address these two items at the same time; they are inextricably linked given that the CPMR Political Bureau is due to be renewed and its President elected at the next General Assembly (Crete, 28/30 October 2020).

For reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is difficult at this time to decide whether or not a "physical" General Assembly will be possible. We need to discuss this, and draw up potential scenarios. She gave the floor to George Alexakis, Vice-Governor of the host Region.

George Alexakis, Vice-Governor of Crete, indicated that his Region – which had hardly been affected by the coronavirus – is prepared to host the General Assembly on 28/30 October 2020. The conference centre that has been booked has sufficient capacity to welcome all members of CPMR in compliance with social distancing rules. However, the availability of flights remains to be checked and it is also a matter of taking account of each person's decision as to whether or not to travel. Mr Alexakis understood that it would be difficult to make a final decision today, but he stressed that it was fully feasible to hold the General Assembly if all the conditions were fulfilled. A decision would need to be taken at the beginning of September

Eleni Marianou thanked Mr Alexakis. Given that we do not know how the pandemic will evolve, she wished to propose and discuss alternative solutions for the event that the General Assembly could not take place physically in Crete. She added that she thought it would not be possible to envisage holding an online General Assembly, in view of the number of people involved and the

way our meetings were organised. Among the possible options she first suggested email exchanges in which CPMR members would focus on three sets of documents to be approved:

- 1- a Final Declaration addressing our policy areas;
- 2- the financial documents;
- 3- the voting procedure for the election of the President and the renewal of the Political Bureau.

After various exchanges and discussions among the Political Bureau, two scenarios emerged:

- **Plan A:** if the health situation permitted, the General Assembly would be held physically in Crete;
- **Plan B:** the documents to be approved would be sent by email to all CPMR members and the President would be elected at an online meeting of the Political Bureau to be held on 29 October 2020. The renewal of the Political Bureau would need to take place **ahead of this date by written consultation** so that the Secretariat would have the new list of members of the Political Bureau in order to convene the online meeting of 29 October.

Cees Loggen, Regional Minister of Noord-Holland and Vice-President of CPMR, said that if the General Assembly in Crete had to be cancelled, he proposed to invite the new Political Bureau to meet in Noord-Holland at the end of October 2020, as long as the health situation and regulations so permitted.

Vasco Cordeiro indicated that, for organisational reasons, a date needed to be set for deciding on which plan to follow. The decision would be based on the evolution of the health crisis and the arrangements to be adopted. He proposed the date of Friday 4 September 2020.

The date of 4 September 2020 was approved by all members of the Political Bureau. The members of CPMR would therefore be informed, on this date, of the decision, which would be taken in the general interest.

Ms Marianou ended by recalling the procedures for renewing the CPMR Political Bureau and electing the President. To comply with the deadlines, the call for candidates would be sent to all member regions of the CPMR on 29 June 2020.

✓ Membership applications

President Cordeiro submitted the membership applications received from the Regions of **Ajara** (Georgia) and **Puglia** (Italy) to the Political Bureau.

The Political Bureau unanimously approved these applications.

A welcome letter will be sent to the Regions shortly.

✓ Withdrawal from membership

President Cordeiro submitted the withdrawal from membership received from the Region of Podlaskie (Poland) to the Political Bureau.

The withdrawal of Podlaskie was ratified by the Political Bureau.

CONCLUSIONS

President Cordeiro concluded the meeting and warmly thanked the members of the Political Bureau for their participation online, the Secretary General and staff of the CPMR for the organisation of this online session, and the interpreters for carrying out their role in these exceptional circumstances provoked by the health crisis.