

1. Macro-Regional Strategies in the EU

Several macro-regions are being identified throughout the European territory, covering large areas across national borders. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was the first to be devised and the European Commission has begun preparations on a Danube Strategy, with others expected in the coming years.

There is no standard definition for a macro-region, except that of “an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges¹.” However, the development of macro-regional strategies in the EU ultimately seeks added-value outcomes for each participant region in a number of areas based on a commonality of priorities. For example, the Baltic Sea Strategy emerged with the strategic vision to make this region more (i) Prosperous (ii) Accessible and Attractive (iii) Environmentally Sustainable and (iv) Safe and Secure.

2. Atlantic Arc Strategy – Identifying a role for Ireland within the Atlantic Arc ‘macro-region’

The Spanish Presidency of the European Union has advocated the Atlantic Arc as the next macro-region upon which the EU should focus and consequently, has called for the development of an 'Atlantic Arc' Strategy for cooperation between Western Europe's maritime countries of France, Portugal, Ireland, Spain and the UK.

This follows-on from a Resolution in September 2009 by the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR), which includes 27 Regions located along the EU's Atlantic coast, calling for an Integrated Strategy for the Atlantic Arc².

The European Commission is currently considering this proposal and on the basis of the conclusions of the General Affairs Council on the Integrated Maritime Policy (November 2009)³ is likely to hold a stakeholders consultation on the merits of an Integrated Strategy for the Atlantic Arc, later in 2010. Such a Strategy could in time provide a framework for coordinated action in a number of well-established maritime sectors, as well as, emerging fields such as marine renewable energies and maritime spatial planning. This would see Atlantic coastal regions from Spain, Portugal, France, Ireland and UK working together, as the CPMR's own-initiative Atlantic Arc Commission has been doing since 1990.

In order to gauge the reaction of the Member States to a possible Commission Communication on the Atlantic Area (possible future Integrated Strategy), DG Mare has met with key representatives and had, in the main, positive responses from Spain, Portugal, France. The reaction from the UK is one of ‘healthy scepticism’ and to-date the Irish Government has not adopted a formal opinion.

Regional and local authorities in Ireland have experience in working in partnership with similar bodies across borders in the Atlantic Arc, mainly through the Atlantic Area IVB Programme (INTERREG) and other EU funded transnational programmes. These co-operation activities help provide an insight into the potential benefit of a more integrated and strategic approach to co-

¹ Source: Macro-regional Strategies in the European Union - published on the Website of DG Regional Policy

² Resolution: http://www.arcatlantique.org/pdf/doc_travail/279_en.pdf and Technical Note: http://www.arcatlantique.org/pdf/doc_travail/278_en.pdf

³ Conclusions adopted by the Council on 16 November 2009 on the Integrated Maritime Policy (doc. 15175/1/09 REV1) <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st15/st15175-re01.en09.pdf>

operation across the Atlantic Arc as well as valuable experiences that could be harnessed for future benefit.

3. Irish Regional Response to an Atlantic Arc Strategy

The Association of Irish Regions (AIR), which represents Ireland's two Regional Assemblies and eight Regional Authorities, having considered the possibility of an integrated strategy for the Atlantic Arc, herein offers its observations as to its role, function and objective from an Irish local and regional perspective.

3.1 Introductory comments

To begin, AIR welcomes any discussion which provides Irish regions with further opportunities to co-operate with regions within the EU and wider afield, especially having regard to the new and emerging economic global challenges we all face. Furthermore, the development of an integrated strategy for the Atlantic Arc is a very relevant concept given the island status of Ireland. The geographic nature of the Atlantic Arc (from the northern tip of Ireland/UK to the southern most part of Spain/Portugal) requires further consideration as to the rationale and added value of a future Integrated Strategy for the Atlantic Arc and AIR suggests that full Irish participation should meet a number of essential aspects, namely:

- (1) A clearly described outline of the added-value to participating regions of implementing this macro-regional strategy within the regions;
- (2) A focus on a limited number of common priorities, with specific objectives, actions and a clearly measurable suite of indicators to enable benchmarking of performance against prescribed aims;
- (3) A multi-level governance approach, taking full account of previous co-operation initiatives in the Atlantic Arc and experience gained thus far from the development and implementation of other EU macro-regional integrated strategies; and
- (4) The need to ensure synergies within and between EU policy instruments and national provisions (including a discussion on funding sources).

3.2 Objective of an Integrated Strategy for the Atlantic Arc

The main purpose of a strategy for the Atlantic Arc should be to identify and co-ordinate aims with actions of relevant common interests within the macro-region, which cannot be addressed at the level of region or Member State alone and which would strengthen and further develop the Atlantic Arc region in the EU and international context. AIR considers that the intended output of a strategy should be the achievement of sustainable growth and the delivery of effective transnational management of projects and initiatives which would collectively benefit the participant regions. The strategy should also be informed and focused on ways to implement EU legislation and policy instruments through the co-operation of the countries and regions involved.

While peripherality is the common strand within this area, it is the opinion of AIR that co-operation and links between and within the regions of the Atlantic Arc may not be seamless or appropriately effective. However, AIR considers that peripherality is a very important commonality and suggests the introduction of 'functional areas of co-operation' within the region as a possible mechanism to ensure proper and effective co-operation.

3.3 Functional areas of co-operation – a Mechanism for Delivery

The sub-division into functional areas of co-operation would provide the Atlantic Arc with a mechanism to address its challenges with a thematic, sectoral and geographical focus, based on its needs and requirements. The marine sub-basins approach as proposed by the CPMR could be

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considered among these functional areas as a mechanism to address marine-related issues. Further, functional areas could be devised on the basis of natural areas, economic activity, growth and jobs, etc, or complementary combinations of these, dependent on political and sectoral needs and processes (such as the Irish Sea region).

3.4 Governance - A Multi-level Approach

AIR considers that the involvement of stakeholders at the sub-national level will provide an important mechanism to the implementation of an integrated strategy for the Atlantic Arc. For example, integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) undertaken at local level and coordinated at regional level in tandem with regional land use planning would ensure local political and sectoral involvement and buy-in to the sustainable management of our coastal areas. The natural progression of this would be the development and implementation of marine spatial planning, overseen by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government with plans being developed and coordinated at regional level. *[Regional Authorities currently have responsibility for terrestrial spatial planning and the inclusion of maritime spatial planning would bring an overall higher integration of land and marine based planning within the regions. Regional Assemblies currently represent national interests on the steering committees for transnational co-operation programmes, which include marine measures, with our neighbouring EU Member States and regions].* Further, a wide range of interests at sub-regional/national levels would be consulted.

This approach would progress regional co-ordination and participation within (a) Ireland, (b) our neighboring regions of UK and (c) within the wider Atlantic Arc, and would ensure regional and transnational political and sectoral involvement and buy-in. This process would also provide the mechanism for implementing any national marine planning policy and would help to deliver the Marine Strategy Framework Directive in Ireland, using the bottom-up approach.

To affect this governance model would require instilling marine and planning expertise at regional level, supported by the appropriate staff in the relevant planning authorities. Further, using this tiered model increases the effective and efficient use of financial and human resources while promoting sustainable management of coastal areas at the local level. *(see Appendix 1).*

3.5 Priorities for Ireland

AIR considers that a regional SWOT analysis, having regard to sustainable economic development, would provide an insight into the actions and policies that Ireland would benefit from and could contribute to, to the best advantage of itself and the Atlantic Arc region. To this end, AIR recommends that an Atlantic Arc Strategy should address its concerns under the following 3 pillars:-

1. Sustainable Socio-Economic Development
2. Environmental Protection
3. Governance

The impact of the following priority areas on each of the 3 pillars should be considered within the SWOT analysis:

- Marine spatial planning and ICZM
- Fisheries/aqua-culture
- Marine-based tourism and activities
- Habitat protection and conservation
- Economic development and employment
- Transport, trade and port development
- Marine safety
- Innovations, research and development
- Communications
- Energy and renewables

4. Conclusions

Based on the foregoing, and bearing in mind that the Marine Strategy Framework Directive⁴ (MSFD) requires Member States to achieve good environmental status in their marine waters by 2020 – [*The various actions required for the implementation of this Directive may benefit from the development of enhanced co-operation under an Atlantic Area Strategy and from the development of other cross-cutting tools, such as marine spatial planning. Further consideration of the implications of implementing the MSFD and the role of various stakeholders is required in Ireland*] – AIR recommends, on behalf of Irish Regional Authorities and Regional Assemblies, that an Integrated Strategy for the Atlantic Arc which enables the participating regions and countries to address common priorities through a multi-level governance mechanism, will apply the principles and goals outlined in the MSFD to the progression of the following sample of recommended actions for each of the 3 pillars identified:

4.1 Economic Development, Growth and Employment Creation

- a. Encouraging and enabling enterprise in the new growth sectors
- b. Supporting and finding new avenues to develop existing performing industries;
- c. Developing an approach to and funding for innovation and research
- d. Developing a fund for the improvement of transport and logistics infrastructure
- e. Enterprise: Cross-border development of innovation and ideas in enterprise, building upon the existing strong linkages between cities, regions and ports, improving competitiveness and removing barriers to trade.
- f. Transport: developing EU transport and economic corridors; building stronger linkages with mainland Europe.
- g. Energy: Mutual development of renewable resources to power the region and beyond, supply security, best practices and using effective technologies.
- h. Communications and technology: Digital infrastructure development; further developing broadband and telecom within region and externally.
- i. Tourism and Recreation: Development of marine resources as an eco-complementary tourism product.

4.2 Environmental Protection

- j. The creation of marine protected areas;
- k. Promoting environmental protection and technologies;
- l. Encouraging sustainable fisheries and aquaculture;
- m. Integrate maritime surveillance systems.
- n. Maritime and environmental management: adopting an ecosystem approach to marine management, ICZM, common fishery policy, maritime safety.
- o. Climate Change: effects of climate change in the region including flooding and rising sea levels; addressing mitigation measures and re-examining lifestyle; using best technology and work practices.

4.3 Multi-Level Governance

- p. Increased co-operation within and between Governments at sub-national level (*see Appendix 1*)
- q. Integrated land use and marine spatial planning: incorporating city and regional co-operation; addressing sustainable development; identifying conflicting uses and providing solutions.

⁴ Directive 2008/56/EC of 17 June 2008

5. Recommendations of the Association of Irish Regions

- 5.1 The Association of Irish Regions supports the on-going efforts of the European Commission to explore the potential benefits of an Atlantic Arc Strategy.
- 5.2 The Association of Irish Regions supports the development of An Integrated Strategy for the Atlantic Arc to achieve clear added-value, focusing on key priorities with the development of 'Functional Areas of Co-operation'.
- 5.3 The Association of Irish Regions recommends that the Irish Government actively engage in the consultations and discussions at EU level on this matter.
- 5.4 The Association of Irish Regions recommends that the Irish Government also initiate consultation with all relevant levels of Government and with stakeholders in marine policy on this matter
- 5.5 The Association of Irish Regions will engage with other stakeholders and participate in the European Commission's consultations on this matter.

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APPENDIX 1

Recommended Governance Model:

In order to participate effectively within a future Atlantic Arc macro-region, AIR suggests a multi-level governance approach in the Irish context. The following diagram provides the visual explanation for the mechanisms set out at 4 above (Governance).

