

## XXIX<sup>th</sup> CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS OF THE OUTERMOST REGIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Saint-Denis de La Réunion, April 7th 2025

Outermost regions of the European Union

The Presidents of the Outermost Regions (ORs) of the European Union (EU), gathered at the XXIX<sup>th</sup> Conference in La Réunion, under the presidency of Ms Huguette Bello, President of the Réunion Regional Council, adopt the following final declaration:

In a complex and constantly changing international context, marked by armed conflicts, high geopolitical tensions, a growing arms race and major environmental challenges, the EU has committed itself to reinventing itself as an autonomous power to face new global challenges, while declaring its desire to preserve solidarity and cohesion between its regions. These are the orientations encouraged by the Draghi, Letta and Niinistö reports, which stress the need to strengthen European security and competitiveness, and to reduce strategic dependencies.

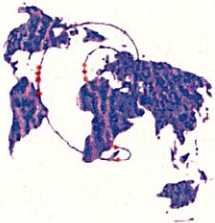
The ORs are particularly sensitive to these developments and remain vigilant to ensure that the new European priorities and the means to achieve them do not compromise the support and spirit of solidarity from which they have historically benefited, given their specific characteristics as recognised in Article 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU).

The Conference :

- ✓ REMAINS confident in the EU's resilience, its ability to find appropriate solutions and its ambition to play a leading role on the international stage;
- ✓ RECALLS that the combination and permanence of constraints specific to the outermost regions are not comparable to any other European region, as recognised by the Treaty, and REAFFIRMS the need to maintain differentiated treatment for the outermost regions, by fully applying the provisions of Article 349 of the TFEU to all European policies;
- ✓ CONSIDERS that the regional approach remains fundamental for the outermost regions, which are the most remote and isolated;
- ✓ REITERATES the need for targeted and systematic impact assessments to enable European policies to be evaluated and better adapted to the context of the outermost regions, in partnership with them ;
- ✓ RECALLS that through their presence in several oceans and continents, the ORs give Europe a global dimension and the largest maritime territory in the world. Their geostrategic position is a major asset for the EU, particularly in terms of regional co-development in the Atlantic, Amazonian, Caribbean and Indian Ocean basins;







- ✓ CALLS UPON the European institutions to take full advantage of their geostrategic realities by opening a dialogue and initiating work, involving them for the benefit of the whole of Europe;
- ✓ EXPRESSES its solidarity with Mayotte and La Réunion, in the context of recent extreme natural events, which have highlighted their vulnerabilities.

## 1. Maintaining European solidarity and adapting policies

### Multiannual financial framework post 2027

The Conference remains concerned about the guidelines for the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), announced as being "*more targeted*" and "*more simple*" from the Union's point of view. In this context, it is defending adequate and joint consideration of the ORs, on the grounds of the specific realities and characteristics that only the ORs share within the EU, and regardless of their level of development.

Whether it's hurricanes Irma, Chido and Garance in St Martin, Mayotte and La Réunion, hurricanes Lorenzo and Beryl in the Azores and Martinique, fires in Madeira, the volcanic eruption of La Palma in the Canaries, storm Fiona in Guadeloupe, drought or torrential rain in French Guiana, every time European solidarity is needed, the Union is called upon and the Member States are solicited.

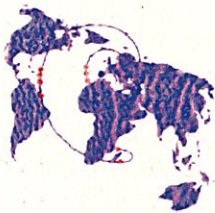
Climatic, health, demographic, economic and social crises, massive migratory flows and wars are just some of the many shocks that hit its populations hard, in addition to the permanent structural constraints of the ORs.

In this context, the Conference:

IS CONCERNED about the initial guidelines for the architecture of the MFF;

- ✓ REQUESTS that the MFF does not deprive the ORs of designing and implementing their own territorial strategies to meet the needs of their populations. A top-down approach would ruin all the efforts made over the years by these regions to develop, create jobs and strengthen their resilience;
- ✓ REJECTS any move towards centralising the management of European funds and reducing the budgets allocated to future cohesion and common agricultural policies, which are fundamental to the development of ORs;
- ✓ CALLS for ORs to benefit fully from the competitiveness fund, given the characteristics of their economic fabric and their research and innovation ecosystems;
- ✓ PLEDGES for the creation of a fund to respond to multiple crises;
- ✓ INVITES the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council Presidency and the Member States to defend a budget that takes account of the EU's historic policies and the specific status of the ORs within each of these policies.





## Economic, social and territorial cohesion policy

For many years, cohesion policy support in the ORs has considerably improved the quality of life of their populations, boosted their competitiveness and helped to develop their assets. Supporting the convergence of the ORs over the long term, by adopting a territorial approach, demonstrates the EU's solidarity with its most remote and isolated regions of continental Europe.

The Conference :

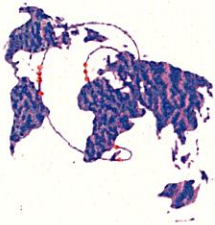
- ✓ REITERATES its attachment to a strengthened, modernised, simpler and more flexible cohesion policy, with solid funding for the post-2027 period, but without losing the essential elements that have always characterised it: the principle of partnership, multi-level governance, subsidiarity, shared management and a territorial approach;
- ✓ DEFENDS the maintenance of specific funding for the ORs and of eligibility rules guaranteeing the full implementation of European funds;
- ✓ REFUSE to allow cohesion policy to be diverted from its initial objectives in response to urgent crises;
- ✓ EMPHASISES that the principle of “do no harm to cohesion” must be applied across the board to all EU policies;
- ✓ NOTES the need for investment in Europe to make up for capability shortfalls and build a solid defence industrial base, and STRESSES that these priorities must not be achieved at the expense of cohesion;
- ✓ ADVOCATES the simplification of fund management procedures and the strengthening of administrative capacities in its regions;
- ✓ REAFFIRMS its request for a "NUTS 2" statistical classification for Saint-Martin on the same basis as all the OR', which is a key indicator for European regional development policies;
- ✓ REQUESTS that the ORs be automatically eligible for all cohesion policy funds, in accordance with Article 349 of the TFEU, which sets out the possibility of specific measures to lay down the conditions for access to funds.

## Agriculture and rural development

The adaptation of the Common Agricultural Policy through the POSEI programmes has helped the ORs to make their agricultural sector more competitive, more sustainable and more resilient. These programmes have provided their farmers with a more stable and predictable framework and have strengthened their position in their territory's food supply chain.

The fact that the budget for these programmes has not been increased since 2007 is putting the brakes on industry activities, with a particularly negative impact on our regions.





### The Conference:

- ✓ CALLS for an increase in the POSEI budget and for management flexibility to be maintained;
- ✓ REQUESTS that the EAFRD co-financing rate of 85 % be reinstated;
- ✓ CALLS for the application of equivalent standards to production from non-EU countries to effectively support the agricultural sectors and improve food sovereignty.

### Maritime, fishing and aquaculture dimension

All the ORs reiterate the importance of the fisheries sector and of blue economy for the development of their territories and food sovereignty, in terms of structuring the economy and guaranteeing a decent income for coastal communities. It is primarily a question of supporting the sectors by enabling them to ensure the renewal of their fishing fleet, the financial support for which is always a burden on the budget of the ORs.

### The Conference :

- ✓ IS CONCERNED that its last position expressed in the final declaration of the XXVIII<sup>th</sup> Conference has not been followed by fully operational effects for all the ORs, locking us into a complex and ineffective legal framework;
- ✓ REITERATES the need for EU financial support for the urgent renewal of OR fishing fleets, which remain obsolete, unhealthy and with no guarantee of safety for fishermen. This is essential to ensure that its fisheries, which have always been sustainable, are also resilient and competitive;
- ✓ MAINTAINS its position to reinstate a POSEI-Fisheries in its initial framework for the next MFF, as a specific and autonomous regional programme to make compensation for additional costs more efficient;
- ✓ REMINDS of its recent contribution on the future European Oceans Pact, which calls for the development of the economies of the ORs to be taken into account in their maritime basins.

### Connectivity and transport

Accessibility by air, sea, land and digital networks is fundamental for the ORs, in terms of internal and external opening up. The aim is not only to guarantee the principle of free movement and equal access to development opportunities, but above all to meet the essential needs of the populations of the ORs who have no alternative.

Regularity and reliability of services to users at a fair price remain major challenges. Environmental legislation must not be used to exacerbate the lack of mobility and accessibility in the ORs.



The geographical position of the ORs still poses major challenges in terms of strategic autonomy and digital sovereignty, making it imperative to deploy an efficient, more resilient and secure submarine cable network.

The Conference :

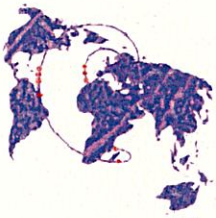
- ✓ RECALLS the importance of European funding for investments in modernizing, catching up, improving securing and decarbonizing connectivity infrastructures, including road networks, as well as ensuring their operation;
- ✓ CALLS for effective measures to strengthen and increase the resilience of the ORs, whose supply chains are clearly more vulnerable;
- ✓ URGES an analysis of the impact of the application of the "Fit for 55" legislative package in the ORs;
- ✓ ADVOCATES for the continuation and improvement of exemptions for the ORs by 2040 in the aviation and maritime sectors;
- ✓ INSISTS on the creation of a "*POSEI-Transport*" programme dedicated to connectivity, outside of cohesion policy funds;
- ✓ INVITES greater investment in the ORs' strategic digital infrastructures, guaranteeing accessibility, redundancy and protection against cyber threats.

### Green and energy transition

The Conference underlines the importance of the green transition in these regions, which are particularly exposed to the effects of climate change and face major challenges in terms of energy autonomy, as they are isolated, non-interconnected and heavily dependent on fossil fuels.

The Conference :

- ✓ EMPHASISES that environmental transition measures must take account of their specific situation;
- ✓ REQUESTS that the ORs be urgently involved in defining and implementing the national plans for the SocialClimateFund;
- ✓ CALLS for the essential strengthening of the security of the ORs' energy networks, with the same interest that the EU has in the security of the continent's energy networks;
- ✓ DRAWS ATTENTION to the need to ensure that the ORs have access to financial support to develop clean energy production, storage and transport capacities, including through collaborative research and innovation actions;
- ✓ STRESSES the importance for the European Commission to adapt the regulatory framework within the CEF-Energy in order to create the conditions for an effective participation of the ORs in this programme;
- ✓ CALLS FOR an OR component in the next European water resilience strategy.





## Immigration

As Europe's external borders, the ORs, located in four distinct basins (Caribbean, Amazon, Indian Ocean, Macaronesia), are subject to a constant influx of irregular migrants. In addition to the structural constraints of the ORs recognised in Article 349 of the TFEU, there are continuous migratory flows, putting additional pressure on their public spending. Their economic development is further penalised by the fact that they are, by necessity, host regions, in the front line of managing migrants who have arrived on European territory.

The Conference :

- ✓ URGES the EU to assume responsibility and solidarity in the face of the migration phenomenon, by imposing an allocation between the Member States of the Schengen area;
- ✓ CALLS for special attention to be paid to unaccompanied minors through specific measures;
- ✓ REQUESTS the operational deployment of all available Frontex resources;
- ✓ DEMANDS that greater account be taken of migratory tensions in certain ORs in the Asylum Migration Integration Fund (AMIF) and Internal Security Fund (ISF) programmes, particularly in the direct management of these funds, through a specific regional allocation.

## Competitiveness

Competition on a global scale is changing rapidly, particularly as a result of geopolitical tensions and economic crises. Competition is expressed differently in the small economies of the ORs, which are characterised by a vulnerable economic fabric, low critical mass, a lack of opportunities and permanent additional costs for companies operating there.

Furthermore, the specific situation of the ORs, which are remote and landlocked, their limited access to scientific collaboration networks and their low capacity to attract investment in research and development, severely hamper the development of research and innovation, despite their unique assets and considerable potential.

The Conference :

- ✓ REGRETS that the new strategy for the single market does not take into account the situation of the ORs and their projection in their regional basin;
- ✓ INVITES the European Commission to draw inspiration from Pedro Solbes' 2011 report on the missing links in the internal market, whose diagnosis and proposals for the ORs are still relevant today;
- ✓ CALLS FOR simplified and adapted measures for the ORs under the future European Competitiveness Fund;
- ✓ ADVOCATES the maintenance of both the "*widening participation and spreading excellence*" strand under the future Horizon Europe programme, and access





for the ORs to this strand, which is relevant to the strengthening of their research and innovation capacities;

- ✓ **DRAWS ATTENTION** to the strategic importance of the ORs' tax systems, in particular Madeira's free zone, dock dues ("*Octroi de mer*") and the AIEM ("*Arbitrio sobre Importaciones y Entregas de Mercancías en las Islas Canarias*").

## 2. Integration into the new EU Strategies and specific support

The communication on the strategy for ORs of May 2022 emphasises the importance of supporting the populations of the ORs by improving their quality of life, promoting economic development and adapting European policies to meet the specific needs of these regions.

The Conference :

- ✓ **WELCOMES** the European Commission's initiative to update the European strategy for the ORs in the context of defining new priorities;
- ✓ **HOPES** that this strategy, which is constantly evolving, will lead to concrete proposals for the ORs, preserving the gains of the European Commission communications adopted since 2000;
- ✓ **ADVOCATES** the strengthening of the OR Unit within the European Commission in order to carry out its work successfully;
- ✓ **LOOKS FORWARD** to the organisation of the next OR FORUM by the European Commission.

To improve the living conditions of our populations, we urgently need to meet the most pressing basic needs, including affordable housing, given the deteriorating social situation in the ORs.

The Conference :

- ✓ **WELCOMES** the European Commission's commitment to making affordable housing a new priority and **CALLS** for specific measures for the ORs, where poverty levels are among the highest in Europe;
- ✓ **PROPOSES** that the ORs benefit from pilot actions arising from the future "*anti-poverty*" and "*affordable housing*" strategies;
- ✓ **CALLS** for targeted action to increase investment in the ORs within the Union of Skills, in order to reduce unemployment, particularly among young people, promote employment, retain talent, combat early school leaving and promote social inclusion.
- ✓ **CALLS UPON** the European Commission to deploy a support measure for youth employment in the ORs.



### 3. Strengthening the geopolitical dimension of the ORs

The Conference highlights the added value of the ORs in new strategic areas, proposing to define specific strategies for the EU's external borders and to maintain programmes tailored to the needs of the ORs and third country partners. These initiatives are designed to strengthen the EU's strategic position while at the same time enhancing the economic opportunities of the ORs.

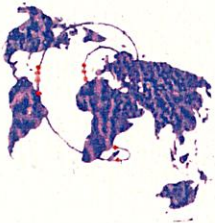
For instance, the current geopolitical context is prompting the EU to promote space as a strategic area for a stronger, better equipped and coordinated Union, to face new challenges, defend its interests and strengthen its strategic position and autonomy.

In this respect, the ORs bring a privileged geostrategic dimension to the EU, as they are spread across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, the Caribbean Sea and the Mozambique Channel, demonstrating the important role they can play for the benefit of the EU as a whole, while at the same time exploiting of the opportunities to diversify their economies.

The Conference :

- ✓ CONSIDERS it essential to provide, within the next INTERREG programmes, a specific strand for the ORs, the integration of European funds from external policy and more flexibility for the management of funds from external policy;
- ✓ LOOKS FORWARD to the definition of a wider neighbourhood policy, which is essential if the ORs are to be fully integrated into their respective regional basins and seize the new development opportunities generated by the emerging traderoutes;
- ✓ CALLS FOR consideration to be given to the problem of isolation, exacerbated by the effects of natural disasters, by adapting regulatory requirements to facilitate cooperation with neighbouring countries;
- ✓ REQUESTS that the perimeters of the cooperation zones under the INTERREG programmes be extended, for the ORs that wish to do so, to promote their effective regional integration.

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In a changing world faced with multiple crises, the Conference of Presidents of the outermost regions sees more than ever the need to raise awareness of the specific characteristics of its regions in order to continue moving towards a European Union that respects and is fully aware of its territorial realities.

Recourse to Article 349 of the TFEU for the design of the Union's multiannual budget and the reforms of European policies must be an imperative to provide adequate responses to the needs of the populations of the outermost regions.

**AÇORES**

**CANARY ISLANDS**

**GUADELOUPE**

**FRENCH  
GUIANA**

**MADÈRE**

**MARTINIQUE**

**MAYOTTE**

**LA REUNION**

**SAINT-MARTIN**

