



May 26th, 2022

INSULEUR G.A. and WORKSHOP

During INSULEUR's Annual General Assembly which was held in Brussels and in hybrid mode on May 23rd, 2022, in Brussels and in hybrid mode, the mandate of the current BoD was extended to one more year whereas a new member was added to INSULEUR's family: the Cámara de Comercio Gran Canaria.

The GA was followed by a hybrid workshop on insular entrepreneurship and Cohesion, moderated by **George Assonitis** (INSULEUR-UHCC) and **Lina Konstantinopoulou** (Policy Director, EUROCHAMBRES) which set the tone and exposed INSULEUR's and CPMR Island Commission commonly shared and enduring stance towards the topic addressed, while **President Roussos** (Cyclades CCI), **President Myrsinias** (Lesvos CCI-INSULEUR), Nikos Reizakis (Rethymnon CCI) and **Sakis Zlatoudis** (Magnesia CCI-EOAEN) intervened for giving among other first-hand insight of the issues affecting islands entrepreneurship but also for insisting on the importance of participating to networks and consultations to ensure that insular Chambers voices are heard by governments and EU institutions.

In its opening speech, **President Stefano Mallia** (EESC Employers' Group) insisted on the fact that the future of cohesion policy must include the adoption of a regionally differentiated approach, adding that cohesion funds need to contribute to better context for start-ups & SMEs and that regulatory package should be made simpler.

President Joseph Borg (INSULEUR-The Gozo Business Chamber) highlighted among other that "Islands have particular handicaps which need to be addressed [...]and this needs to be acknowledged in Cohesion Policy and in specific instruments which try to address these limitations."

President Kechagioglou (Greek Small Islands Network) put the specificities of small islands at the heart of the discussion by reminding that entrepreneurship is one of the key pillars for their development and **MEP Josianne Cutajar** addressed the workshop on how to assist entrepreneurs coming from European islands and the need to focus on tackling extra-costs and on avoiding unnecessary burdens to help businesses / SMEs thrive in insular regions.

Claudia Guzzon (Executive Secretary of the CPMR - Islands Commission) reflected on islands' competitiveness disadvantages and the need to acknowledge and address the disparities resulting from EU measures, such as REPowerEU and Fitfor55.

Irene Mikelis (INSULEUR expert) pointed out to the weight of SMEs in EU economy, the causes of the competitive disadvantage for insular ones, insisted on the need for a long-term vision and a specific strategy for EU islands as well as a full application of art 174 TFEU in all EU policies.



INSULEUR BoD

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President, Gozo Business
Chamber (Malta)

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Islands' potential as test beds and laboratories for innovation and technologies was moreover highlighted, putting forward the achievements and lessons learned by the implementation of 2 ERDF co-funded Interreg MED projects: Compose Plus (**Marina Maniati**, INSULEUR expert) and BLUE Crowdfunding - Interreg Med Project (Irene Mikelis) in the fields of RES, Energy Efficiency, Blue Economy and alternative sources of finance.

Vincent Leiner (Team Leader, DG REGIO G1 European Commission) took the floor to update the participating CCIS and institutions on the comprehensive framework set up for supporting insular enterprises and the tailored programmes targeting islands in particular, for driving forward their economy diversification and transition towards greener and smarter initiatives but also towards upgrading of skills. "The challenge now, he added, lies in using these resources to the best of their potential for islands", although as he also mentioned, one difficulty lies in capturing a clear picture of the situation of islands due their diversity, varying from Island-states to very small islands.

President Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis (Corsica Assembly-CoR member) highlighted the need to have right indicators going beyond GDP only, to assess territorial impact of legislation in islands, the need for an Island desk set up as a single-entry point within the European Commission as well as the need for state aid rules exemptions for Islands and their businesses that would answer their inherent handicaps linked in particular to transport, energy and connectivity.

Vice-President Ioannis Vardakastanis (EESC, ECO section) also reminded among other that for the past 2 decades many islands have suffered from economic stagnation or decline, failing to catchup with the developing rhythm of mainland regions. While convergence is accelerating within the EU, regional disparities are increasing when it comes to islands. Recognition, flexibility and priority for islands in EU policies are key words to secure their survival and competitiveness. Cohesion Policy however and unfortunately still does not offer a comprehensive approach towards all issues raised during the workshop. The role of National states and EU institutions was presented as absolutely crucial in addressing those.

This hybrid workshop was organized by INSULEUR in partnership with the EESC - European Economic and Social Committee, and in collaboration with the CPMR - Conference of peripheral maritime regions Islands Commission and the ESIN European Small Islands Federation.



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