



NETWORK OF THE INSULAR CHAMBRERS OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

INSULEUR Position Paper on Forthcoming European Policies

SYROS DECLARATION

Ensuring Europe's Islands Are Fully Reflected in Post-2027 EU Policy

Executive Summary

European islands face permanent structural constraints that limit their access to opportunities available to mainland regions. At the same time, they hold unique strategic value for the EU — economically, culturally, environmentally and geopolitically. As the European Commission prepares the next programming period (post-2027), INSULEUR calls for a dedicated and coherent EU framework that recognises the specificity of island territories in line with Article 174 TFEU. This position paper outlines the key principles and recommendations required to ensure future EU policies support competitiveness, connectivity, resilience and sustainable development across EU islands.

Context and Rationale

Islands are recognised in the Treaties as territories with specific and permanent constraints. Despite this, policy instruments addressing their needs remain fragmented across sectors and programmes. The lack of an integrated approach results in unequal access to funding, disproportionate administrative burden, limited investment capacity and challenges for SMEs — particularly micro-enterprises, which form the backbone of island economies.

Islands are often presented as peripheral; however, they are central to the EU's strategic interests: security in the Mediterranean, blue economy leadership, preservation of biodiversity hotspots, clean energy transition, circular tourism models and cultural identity. Not addressing their specific needs risks widening territorial inequalities and weakening EU cohesion objectives.

INSULEUR Position

INSULEUR believes the post-2027 EU framework must move beyond scattered measures and adopt a structured, long-term and legally recognised approach to island development. This requires acknowledging both the structural disadvantages experienced by EU islands and the opportunities they represent for European sovereignty, sustainability and innovation.

A tailored approach must prioritise: reliable connectivity, support for SMEs, access to funding adapted to insular realities, climate adaptation strategies, administrative simplification and structured involvement of island actors in policymaking. Islands should not be treated as small, remote extensions of national mainland territories — but as distinct European regions deserving targeted support and representation.

Guiding Principles

Future EU policy addressing islands should be based on principles of territorial fairness, strategic relevance, guaranteed connectivity, proportional access to funding, SME-centred economic support, participatory governance and simplified administrative procedures. These principles collectively reflect the need to shift from a uniform policy framework to one that acknowledges the structural realities of island regions and responds with adapted policy instruments and implementation mechanisms.

Strategic Vision

European islands face persistent and complex challenges, including demographic shifts, climate vulnerability, limited connectivity, and a growing sense of detachment from national and EU institutions. These issues are compounded by geographic isolation and long-standing structural constraints. Yet islands also represent vital assets for Europe's territorial cohesion, food security, biodiversity, and cultural heritage.

Island economies are unique ecosystems of innovation and resilience, with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-enterprises forming the backbone of local development. Strengthening entrepreneurship in island regions is essential for achieving the EU's Green and Digital Transition goals and for ensuring balanced territorial development.

Required policy actions

1. Territorial Cohesion Must Include Islands and Remote Areas

The post-2027 framework must explicitly recognise island territories within EU

cohesion policy, ensuring that policies and funding instruments reflect their permanent structural constraints and strategic contribution to the EU.

2. **Strengthen Competitiveness Through Island-Based Entrepreneurship**
Future policies should reinforce SME support mechanisms and investment tools that reflect the micro-enterprise structure of island economies, enabling innovation, green transition and sustainable economic diversification.
3. **Ensure Real Simplification and Accessible Procedures for Island Stakeholders**
Access to funding and EU instruments must become proportionate, flexible and realistically achievable for small-scale beneficiaries with limited administrative capacity.
4. **Guarantee Essential Transport, Digital and Energy Connectivity for Islands**
Connectivity must be treated as a basic right for citizens and businesses, ensuring reliable, affordable and sustainable access to transport, broadband and energy infrastructure.
5. **Establish Flexible Emergency Mechanisms for Insular Vulnerability and Crisis Response**
Future frameworks must include mechanisms addressing natural disasters, climate risk and economic shocks, recognising the vulnerability and isolation of insular territories.
6. **Embed Multilevel Governance and Formal Chamber Involvement in EU Decision-Making**
Island Chambers and regional representatives must play a formal role in shaping, implementing and monitoring EU policies affecting islands.
7. **Advance International Cooperation and Strategic Island Diplomacy**
EU action should promote partnerships between European islands and global island networks, positioning the EU as a leader in insular development and sustainability.
8. **Prioritise Decentralised Investment Supporting Sustainability and Climate Neutrality**
Funding frameworks must support models tailored to insular ecosystems, including renewable energy, circular economy strategies and nature-based solutions.
9. **Support Chamber-Led Initiatives to Build Capacity, Visibility and Innovation in Island Economies**
Chambers should be empowered as key facilitators in delivering support services, skills development and business innovation for island SMEs.
10. **Secure a Dedicated EU Strategy for Islands as the Way Forward**
A long-term, structured and transversal EU Islands Strategy is required to ensure continuity, visibility and impact across sectors and funding programmes.

CONCLUSION AND CALL FOR ACTION

INSULEUR reaffirms the need for a **dedicated EU Strategy for Islands**, distinct from broader territorial initiatives. The Commission’s Communication “**A modernized Cohesion Policy: The mid-term review**” (COM(2025) 163 final, 1 April 2025) explicitly recognized that “*islands and outermost regions face specific challenges related to the higher costs of raw materials and energy... and to their physical disconnection and remoteness from the mainland.*” In this same document, the Commission explicitly announced that it would **launch a consultation on the development of a Strategy for Islands** and an updated Strategy for Outermost Regions.

However, the subsequent **Commission Work Program 2026 (COM(2025) 870 final, 21 October 2025)** and its **Annex I** now refer to a forthcoming “*Communication on islands and coastal communities (non-legislative, Q2 2026).*” This represents a **significant departure** from the earlier commitment to a stand-alone Islands Strategy. Extending the initiative to include coastal communities would encompass large portions of mainland Europe that do not share the **structural, permanent handicaps of insularity**, thereby **diluting the specific focus** and the tailor-made policy instruments long advocated for island territories.

INSULEUR therefore expresses its strong **disagreement with the inclusion of coastal communities** in this framework and calls on the European Commission to **maintain a distinct policy pathway for islands** within Cohesion Policy. The network stresses that islands constitute a clearly defined territorial category under Article 174 TFEU and require dedicated attention to connectivity, accessibility, demographic resilience, and economic diversification.

INSULEUR further urges the European Commission to reaffirm the commitment expressed in the April 2025 mid-term review and to **initiate an inclusive consultation leading to a dedicated EU Strategy for Islands**, ensuring that insular territories are included within the core of the Union’s territorial cohesion objectives.

To ensure regulatory coherence, future EU regulations should systematically incorporate specific provisions for island territories. This is essential to prevent situations in which horizontal regulatory limits unintentionally override the recognition of insularity enshrined in Article 174 TFEU. The Commission should therefore adopt technical specifications and regulatory safeguards that ensure that the distinct structural constraints faced by islands are fully compatible with the general application of EU rules.

The President of Insuleur



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