

Atlantic strategy needs strengthening after Brexit

European Committee of the Regions calls on EU and national governments to step up efforts to develop Atlantic coastal economies.

□**The United Kingdom's planned departure from the European Union poses a threat to fragile coastal economies and communities across the Atlantic region, the European Committee of the Regions has said. In recommendations adopted on 1 December, the EU's assembly of local and regional leaders urges the EU to reinforce its still-young Atlantic strategy and to allow UK regions and local authorities to be able to continue to take part in EU programmes.**

The [recommendations](#) also urge Ireland, France, Spain and Portugal to respond to the UK's withdrawal from the EU by cooperating more closely on maritime issues to fill resulting gaps in science and innovation, surveillance, ocean energy and maritime investments. In its opinion, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) described the potential consequences for the Common Fisheries Policy of the UK's departure as alarming, reinforcing the need for a comprehensive approach to economic development and job growth in coastal regions and islands.

The author of the report – **Jerry Lundy** (IE/ALDE), member of Sligo County Council and the Northern and Western Regional Assembly – said: “We’ve now had the EU [Atlantic strategy](#) and its [action plan](#) for almost five years, and it has helped regions to recover from the economic crisis and to preserve the marine and coastal ecosystem, but we need to update and strengthen the plan. We in the Atlantic region are about to lose a major maritime nation from the European Union and a big investor in the marine economy and research, the United Kingdom. For the strategy's credibility and visibility, we think that the EU should provide dedicated funding, rather than obliging communities to search for support across the EU's funds. We're looking at cooperation between the Atlantic states in terms of job creation, tourism, fisheries, sustainable energy and, most of all, funding.”

[Mr Lundy](#) continued: “We need to continue the work of rejuvenating our coastal regions and islands. You can't have an economy if you don't have a community. You can't revitalise your community if you don't have an economic plan that will keep young people there. So you need to make sure that skills, heritage and folklore of your community are not lost, and you need to keep investing in young people and new jobs.”

Emphasising the potential for a revitalisation of coastal regions, Mr Lundy said: “Instead of looking downwards – for coal, gas and oil – as we did in the past, let's look up – at the wind, sun and waves producing sustainable and clean energy. Training, skills and good roads are important, but also broadband. A lot of companies that would set up business along the coastline need to get their products to the market and need good connectivity. If we

fulfil these conditions I'm confident we can create more jobs in coastal and island regions. An example from my region is the [Wild Atlantic Way](#), which we are developing to encourage tourists and entrepreneurs to visit and invest."

Also on 1 December, the European Committee of the Regions adopted [recommendations](#) that called on the EU to focus more on modernising Europe's rural regions, by transforming its 'smart villages' initiative into a full EU Rural Agenda. The EU adopted an EU urban agenda in 2016. The rapporteur on 'smart villages' is **Enda Stenson** (IE/European Alliance), a member of Leitrim County Council.

Mr Lundy's opinion on the Atlantic strategy builds on the recommendations of the CoR for the future of the EU's [Cohesion Policy post-2020](#) and on the [Committee's resolution in March 2017 on the UK's intention to withdraw from the European Union](#). On 30 November, members of the CoR held a wide-ranging [debate on the implications of the UK's planned departure from the EU](#), with over 30 speakers taking the floor, Mr Lundy included.

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