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Recommendations on the future of the outermost regions and the single market

Brussels, 12 October 2011 - Integrating the Outermost Regions¹ (OR) of the European Union into the single market by making better use of their assets with a view to attaining the objectives of the 2020 Strategy: this is the goal of a series of recommendations put forward by the former European Commissioner, Pedro Solbes, in a report presented today to Michel Barnier, Commissioner for the Internal Market and Services. According to the report, the specific characteristics common to these regions and their different situations are not always fully taken into account in European policies.

This leads to certain problems in terms of their participation in the single market. For example, transporting goods to the outermost regions can cost up to five times as much as transporting them within mainland Europe. Another example is the reliance on low-capacity undersea cable connections, which makes it difficult for citizens and businesses to enjoy the freedoms associated with the single market. Finally, the effects of the economic crisis were particularly severe in most of these regions, where unemployment rates are around the 30% mark, highlighting the structural weaknesses of their economies.

To address this, the Solbes Report contains 22 recommendations. They are closely linked to the main approaches taken by the Single Market Act (see [IP/11/469](#)), and are aimed in particular at consolidating the progress made by the measures already taken with a view to compensating for the structural handicaps of these regions, integrating them into European networks or promoting them as "gateways to Europe". The report also proposes an action plan that will enable the ORs to make better use of their assets (in space exploitation, in their role as natural biodiversity laboratories, reference laboratories for the challenges of climate change, and experimental laboratories for renewable energies and integrated management of the sea) and adapt to new challenges by opening up to sectors with high added value (including the traditional sectors) while supporting innovation, in order to be able to contribute to the objectives of the 2020 strategy.

¹ The OR currently consist of four French overseas departments and regions (**Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana and Réunion**) and two overseas collectivities (**Saint-Barthélemy and Saint-Martin**); two autonomous regions of Portugal (**Madeira and the Azores**) and the **Canary Islands** (Spanish Autonomous Community).

Commissioner Barnier said: *"In these times of economic and social crisis, we should seek to improve the integration of the outermost regions of Europe in the single market not only because they need it, but also - and above all - because Europe needs them, particularly if it is to attain the objectives of the 2020 Strategy".*

Mr Solbes, in turn, stressed that the geo-strategic position of the ORs *"enables these regions to play an essential role in the development of the external dimension of the single market while contributing to the EU's influence in the world"*.

The report suggests an action plan with tangible and measurable objectives and deadlines for achieving these objectives at a fast enough rate in each OR. The measures proposed are geared towards bringing about true integration of the ORs in the single market by pursuing the following objectives:

1. Improve access to financing for PMEs, and particularly micro-enterprises, in the ORs.
2. Improve the mobility of citizens of the ORs, particularly young people and, more specifically, students, including mobility within their regional environment; develop specific training courses in the spheres corresponding to the needs of the ORs (logistics, telecommunications, the green economy, health and personal services, etc.), promote the recognition of professional qualifications in these spheres and encourage out-of-season stays by certain categories of people.
3. Reinforce the confidence of consumers in the ORs in the implementation of their rights by establishing alternative dispute settlement systems between overseas countries and territories, the ORs and neighbouring third countries.
4. Make use of networks to reduce the accessibility deficit and improve the integration of the ORs.
5. Improve the integration of the ORs into the single digital market.
6. Promote better use of energy resources, prioritising clean energy sources in the ORs.
7. Ensure social cohesion by maintaining and improving the measures adopted (cohesion policy, agricultural, maritime and biodiversity policies, research and innovation) in favour of the ORs to compensate for their geographical disadvantages.
8. Support the integration of the ORs in their respective regional markets.
9. Promote the ORs as *"gateways to Europe"* in their respective geographical areas.

Background

In late 2010, in the course of re-launching the single market, Commissioner Barnier asked Mr Pedro Solbes Mira, former European Commissioner and formerly Spain's Minister of Agriculture and Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, to undertake a study on the place of the ORs within the single market.

The concept of European 'outermost region' applies to the following regions:

- one Spanish Autonomous Community: the **Canary Islands**,
- the two Portuguese autonomous regions: the **Azores** and **Madeira**;
- the four French overseas departments and regions (**Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana and Réunion**) and two overseas collectivities (**Saint-Martin and Saint-Barthélemy, the latter retaining OR status until 1 January 2012**).

Despite the geographical remoteness of these regions (particularly extreme in the case of the French regions, which are all more than 6 000 km from mainland Europe) and their island status (except for French Guiana), the single market legislation applies to them in full. Their legal, economic, political and social context has changed since the Communication from the Commission on the outermost regions was adopted in 2008, which highlighted the assets they represented for the EU². In June 2010 the Council asked the Commission to prepare a communication presenting a fresh strategy for the ORs. This is expected to be adopted in spring 2012.

The Solbes report is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/outermost_regions/index_en.htm

² COM(2008) 642 final, 17 October 2008: "The outermost regions: an asset for Europe".
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/rup2008/rup_com2008642_en.pdf

ANNEX: The ORs in figures

Socio-economic data: employment rate (% of population aged 15 – 64)

	2007	2007	2007	2008	2008	2008	2009	2009	2009
	Homm es	Femm es	Total	Homm es	Femmes	Total	Homm es	Femmes	Total
UE 27	72.4	58.2	65.3	72.7	59.0	65.8	70.7	58.5	64.6
Espagne	76.2	54.7	65.6	73.5	54.9	64.3	66.6	52.8	59.8
Canarias	72.1	52.3	62.4	66.4	48.5	57.6	59.4	45.9	52.7
France	68.7	59.2	63.9	69.1	59.9	64.4	68.0	59.6	63.7
Guadeloupe	55.2	45.3	50.0	55.0	45.0	49.6	51.6	44.7	47.9
Martinique	51.6	47.1	49.2	51.5	45.5	48.3	52.1	46.8	49.3
Guyane	54.5	36.0	44.9	53.6	34.6	43.8	55.0	38.7	46.6
Réunion	52.8	38.1	45.2	52.8	39.3	45.8	51.4	38.7	44.8
Saint-Barthélemy	N.D.		61,4	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.
Saint-Martin	N.D.		46,9	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.
Portugal	73.8	61.9	67.8	74.0	62.5	68.2	71.1	61.6	66.3
Açores	75.8	49.8	63.0	77.2	51.8	64.7	75.6	53.6	64.8
Madeira	72.0	60.4	66.1	73.1	61.3	67.0	69.4	62.8	66.0

Socio-economic data: unemployment rate (% of population aged > 15 years)

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
UE 27	8.9	8.4	7.2	7.0	8.9
Espagne	9.2	8.5	8.3	11.3	18.0
Canarias	11.7	11.7	10.4	17.4	26.2
France	9.3	9.3	8.4	7.8	9.5
Guadeloupe	25.9	26.9	22.6	21.9	23.4
Martinique	18.7	24.1	21.1	22.3	21.8
Guyane	24.8	28.5	20.1	21.4	20.2
Réunion	30.1	28.3	24.1	24.4	27.1
Saint-Barthélemy	N.D.	N.D.	3,2	N.D.	N.D.
Saint-Martin	N.D.	N.D.	24,4	N.D.	N.D.
Portugal	7.6	7.7	8.0	7.6	9.5
Açores	4.1	3.8	4.3	5.5	6.7
Madeira	4.5	5.4	6.8	6.0	7.6

Socio-economic data: long-term unemployment rate, women and young people

	Chômage de longue durée (% du chômage total)			Chômage femmes (% du total population âgée > 15 ans)			Chômage jeunes (entre 15 et 24 ans)		
	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009	2007	2008	2009
UE 27	43,05	37,36	33,47	7,9	7,5	8,9	15,5	15,6	19,9
Espagne	20,43	17,87	23,72	10,9	13,0	18,4	18,2	24,6	37,8
Canarias	21,82	19,71	27,78	13,0	19,0	27,0	22,4	32,1	47,9
France	42,57	40,31	37,39	9,0	8,4	9,8	19,6	19,1	23,3
Guadeloupe	82,17	80,82	78,48	26,0	25,5	26,3	53,3	51,7	59,3
Martinique	79,56	76,81	73,71	21,6	24,2	23,0	45,0	50,0	57,6
Guyane	75,63	79,68	76,61	25,1	28,8	25,9	39,9	39,6	37,6
Réunion	67,56	68,51	61,67	25,8	26,4	29,0	46,8	47,6	49,6
Portugal	47,14	47,41	44,17	9,6	8,8	10,2	16,6	16,4	20,0
Açores	38,41	43,68	39,81	6,5	8,3	8,0	12,1	12,8	15,9
Madeira	46,36	48,58	48,60	7,1	6,3	6,1	16,9	15,1	19,7

Socio-economic data: economic indicators

	Taux de croissance annuel moyen PIB (2000 – 2005)	Index PIB/hab (pps) (UE = 100)			Croissance du PIB réel (variation annuelle moyenne en% 2005 - 2007)
		2003	2006	2009	
UE27	1.5	100%	100%	100%	3.10
Espagne	3.3	101%	104%	103%	3.79
Canarias	3.4	94%	93%	90%	3.43
France	1.6	112%	108%	106%	2.30
Guadeloupe	2.3	67%	70%	69%	n/a
Martinique	2.2	74%	76%	76%	n/a
Guyane	5.6	56%	53%	49%	n/a
Réunion	3.0	61%	65%	63%	n/a
Portugal	0.9	79%	78%	78%	1.83
Açores	2.6	72%	73%	73%	2.63
Madeira	2.6	95%	104%	103%	2.33

Socio-economic data: household income (euros/unit of consumption)

	1999	2004	2007
Espagne	9.899,0	13.339,2	15.977,0
Canarias	9.625,1	12.109,4	14.031,9
France	15.802,0	19.046,8	21.132,9
DROM	9.257,1	10.521,4	11.355,8
Guadeloupe	9.377,5	N.D.	N.D.
Martinique	10.452,5	N.D.	N.D.
Guyane	8.822,3	N.D.	N.D.
Réunion	8.638,9	N.D.	N.D.
Saint-Barthélemy	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.
Saint-Martin	N.D.	N.D.	N.D.
Portugal	7.495,7	9.075,6	9.943,0
Açores	6.640,8	8.657,2	9.411,0
Madeira	6.920,6	9.595,1	10.161,9

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