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Assessment of the new Commission communication on outermost regions

European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2023 on the assessment of the new Commission communication on outermost regions (2022/2147(INI))

(C/2024/480)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which grants the outermost regions (ORs) of the EU their status,
- having regard to Articles 174 and 355 TFEU, which set out, inter alia, the territorial scope of the Treaties and the specific provisions applying to the ORs,
- having regard to Article 107(3)(a) TFEU, which provides that aid to promote the economic development of the ORs may be compatible with the internal market,
- having regard to Article 7 TFEU, which stipulates that the Union must ensure consistency between its policies and activities, taking all of its objectives into account and in accordance with the principle of conferral of powers,
- having regard to Title XVIII TFEU, which establishes the objective of economic, social and territorial cohesion and specifies the structural financial instruments to achieve this,
- having regard to the judgment of the Grand Chamber of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) of 15 December 2015 ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 3 May 2022 entitled 'Putting people first, securing sustainable and inclusive growth, unlocking the potential of the EU's outermost regions' (COM(2022)0198),
- having regard to the final declaration of the 27th Conference of Presidents of the Outermost Regions of the European Union, which took place at the European Parliament in Brussels on 15 and 16 November 2022,
- having regard to the final declaration of the 26th Conference of Presidents of the Outermost Regions of the European Union, which took place in Ponta Delgada, Azores, from 17 to 20 November 2021,
- having regard to the joint declaration by the Presidents of the Outermost Regions of the European Union resulting from the mid-term meeting of 3 May 2021,
- having regard to the final declaration of the 25th Conference of Presidents of the Outermost Regions of the European Union, which took place in Mayotte on 26 and 27 November 2020,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2018/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 1 December 2022 on a European Agenda for Tourism 2030,
- having regard to the EU's annual report on the state of regions and municipalities, published in October 2022 by the European Committee of the Regions,
- having regard to the 8th Environment Action Programme and the concepts set out therein,

⁽¹⁾ Judgment of the Court of Justice (Grand Chamber) of 15 December 2015, *European Parliament and European Commission v Council of the European Union*, Joined Cases C-132/14 to C-136/14, ECLI:EU:C:2015:813.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 328, 21.12.2018, p. 82.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 257, 28.8.2014, p. 135.

- having regard to the study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the outermost regions published by the Commission in January 2022 ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to the study entitled ‘Cohesion Policy and Climate Change’, published by its Directorate-General for Internal Policies on 15 April 2021 ⁽⁵⁾,
- having regard to the Commission report of 9 February 2022 entitled ‘Cohesion in Europe towards 2050 — Eighth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion’,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 9 December 2020 entitled ‘Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy — putting European transport on track for the future’ (COM(2020)0789),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 19 November 2020 entitled ‘An EU Strategy to harness the potential of offshore renewable energy for a climate neutral future’ (COM(2020)0741),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled ‘EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 — Bringing nature back into our lives’ (COM(2020)0380) and to Parliament’s resolution of 9 June 2021 thereon ⁽⁶⁾,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 24 October 2017 entitled ‘A stronger and renewed strategic partnership with the EU’s outermost regions’ (COM(2017)0623),
- having regard to the Commission report of 23 March 2020 on the implementation of the Commission Communication on a stronger and renewed strategic partnership with the EU’s outermost regions (COM(2020)0104),
- having regard to the European Committee of the Regions opinion of 10 December 2020 on the European Commission report on the implementation of the renewed strategic partnership with the EU’s outermost regions (2021/C 37/10),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 June 2012, entitled ‘The outermost regions of the European Union: towards a partnership for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ (COM(2012)0287),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 17 October 2008 entitled ‘The outermost regions: an asset for Europe’ (COM(2008)0642),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 12 September 2007 entitled ‘Strategy for the Outermost Regions: Achievements and Future Prospects’ (COM(2007)0507),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 26 May 2004 entitled ‘A stronger partnership for the outermost regions’ (COM(2004)0343),
- having regard to the Commission proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on nature restoration (COM(2022)0304),
- having regard to its resolution of 3 May 2022 entitled ‘Towards a sustainable blue economy in the EU: the role of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors’ ⁽⁷⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 14 September 2021 on a new approach to the Atlantic maritime strategy ⁽⁸⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 14 September 2021 entitled ‘Towards a stronger partnership with the EU outermost regions’ ⁽⁹⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 6 July 2017 on promoting cohesion and development in the outermost regions of the EU: implementation of Article 349 of the TFEU ⁽¹⁰⁾,

⁽⁴⁾ European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, *Study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the outermost regions (OR): final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2776/541180>.

⁽⁵⁾ Study entitled ‘Cohesion Policy and Climate Change’, European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B — Structural and Cohesion Policies, 15 April 2021.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 67, 8.2.2022, p. 25.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ C 465, 6.12.2022, p. 2.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ C 117, 11.3.2022, p. 30.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ C 117, 11.3.2022, p. 18.

⁽¹⁰⁾ OJ C 334, 19.9.2018, p. 168.

- having regard to its resolution of 27 April 2017 on the management of the fishing fleets in the Outermost Regions ⁽¹¹⁾,
 - having regard to its resolution of 26 February 2014 on optimising the potential of outermost regions by creating synergies between the Structural Funds and other European Union programmes ⁽¹²⁾,
 - having regard to its resolution of 18 April 2012 on the role of Cohesion Policy in the outermost regions of the European Union in the context of EU 2020 ⁽¹³⁾,
 - having regard to its recommendation of 20 January 2022 to the Council and the Commission following the investigation of alleged contraventions and maladministration in the application of Union law in relation to the protection of animals during transport within and outside the Union ⁽¹⁴⁾,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the opinions of the Committee on Budgets, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, the Committee on Transport and Tourism and the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A9-0156/2023),
- A. whereas the ORs — French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, Réunion and Saint Martin (France), the Azores and Madeira (Portugal) and the Canary Islands (Spain) — are home to five million European citizens and represent major geostrategic assets for the European Union (EU) and its Member States; whereas they have assets of enormous potential, recognised by the Commission, namely their young population, extensive maritime economic zones, a rich biodiversity and a great wealth of renewable energy sources, which are important for achieving the EU's climate objectives, as well as the capacity to develop the EU's activities in space sciences and astrophysics;
- B. whereas the ORs also face permanent structural constraints as a result of the combination of their insularity (except for French Guiana), geographical dispersion, remoteness, small size, rough terrain and harsh climate; whereas current demographic indicators point to a dramatic population decline in most of the ORs ⁽¹⁵⁾, which also have to cope with seasonal demographic pressure; whereas their local markets are generally small and their economic dependence on a few local products and on the imports of many other products results in significant trade deficits;
- C. whereas these structural constraints are a serious handicap for the development of the ORs and specific measures have therefore been adopted by the EU on customs and trade policies, fiscal policy, free zones, agriculture and fisheries policies, conditions for the supply of raw materials and essential consumer goods, State aid and conditions of access to structural funds and to horizontal Union programmes; whereas further specific measures need to be taken to establish the conditions for the harmonious application of the Treaties, including common policies, without undermining the coherence of the Union legal order and in order to contribute to strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU;
- D. whereas the judgment of the Grand Chamber of the CJEU of 15 December 2015 clarified the broad scope of Articles 349 and 355 TFEU for the ORs;
- E. whereas, under the Common Provisions Regulation, the ORs have specific additional allocations from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT EU), a specific component under the Interreg programme for the 2021-2027 programming period and a specific allocation within the Just Transition Fund Regulation;

⁽¹¹⁾ OJ C 298, 23.8.2018, p. 92.

⁽¹²⁾ OJ C 285, 29.8.2017, p. 58.

⁽¹³⁾ OJ C 258 E, 7.9.2013, p. 1.

⁽¹⁴⁾ OJ C 336, 2.9.2022, p. 20.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, Saint Martin, the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands (*Cohesion in Europe towards 2050, Eighth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion*, European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, p. 200, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/cohesion-report_en).

- F. whereas the ORs economies have suffered heavy consequences following the introduction of restrictive measures due to the pandemic in March 2020 ⁽¹⁶⁾; whereas gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in the ORs is below the EU average, including below their own countries' averages, and poverty rates are sometimes among the highest in Europe;
- G. whereas young people are a vital asset for the recovery and development of all EU regions, in particular the ORs; whereas in Mayotte half of the population is under the age of 18, while in French Guiana, one inhabitant in two is under 25; whereas the ORs have high levels of young people who are not in education, employment ⁽¹⁷⁾ or training (NEETs), as well as high rates of early school leavers, namely a high school dropout rate; whereas these rates are higher than the average for the EU and for their respective Member State;
- H. whereas the presence of long-term unemployment in the ORs can be explained by the mismatch between skills and labour market expectations, with too few, as well as unsuitable, employment and training opportunities in these territories; whereas it is necessary to ensure that training is adequate to the needs of businesses in the ORs;
- I. whereas young people from the outermost regions frequently need to travel and move to other regions to obtain specific training and education; whereas the lack of employment opportunities in the ORs has led to a massive exodus of young people, which has had a strong impact on the demography and development of these territories ⁽¹⁸⁾; whereas many of those who have moved away will not come back later on;
- J. whereas the development of digital skills in the ORs is a prerequisite for achieving a digital transition that leaves no one behind;
- K. whereas the lack of infrastructure and the level of digitalisation in the ORs do not allow for the effective deployment of distance learning, teleworking or the digital delivery of public services related to employment and social welfare;
- L. whereas the ESF allocations for the 2014-2020 period have not been fully used in the ORs, while this programming period is coming to an end;
- M. whereas only 28 500 people from the ORs benefited from mobility under the Erasmus+ programme during the 2014-2020 period;
- N. whereas access to essential services such as drinking water, decent housing, electricity, education, healthcare, public transport and the internet is not a reality for all inhabitants of the ORs;
- O. whereas the employment rate of women in the ORs is significantly below the EU and national averages (47 % compared to 62 % in the EU-27) ⁽¹⁹⁾; whereas women in the ORs often face unstable and short-term employment; whereas female unemployment is higher than male unemployment in all ORs except Réunion ⁽²⁰⁾;
- P. whereas effective deployment of the ESF+ is necessary in response to the high levels of unemployment in the outermost regions, affecting young people in particular;

⁽¹⁶⁾ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2216604f-7420-11ec-9136-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

⁽¹⁷⁾ The EU average youth unemployment rate was 16,8 % in 2022, above 50 % in Mayotte and the Canary Islands, almost 40 % in Réunion, Guadeloupe and Martinique and almost 30 % in French Guiana.

⁽¹⁸⁾ COM(2022)0198, p. 2.

⁽¹⁹⁾ SWD(2022)0133 from May 2022 illustrates the female employment rates in the ORs compared to the average European levels. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/outermost-regions/rup-2022/comm-rup-2022-glance_en.pdf.

⁽²⁰⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/outermost-regions/rup-2022/comm-rup-2022_en.pdf, p. 5.

- Q. whereas the scourge of drug addiction contributes to social and economic exclusion and disengagement from the labour market in the ORs, as well as posing a threat to the health of young people and the safety of the population ⁽²¹⁾;
- R. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed even more the fragilities of the ORs' economies, which result from their insularity and/or geographical situation and, in particular, the functioning of their supply and consumption circuits; whereas the pandemic has also exposed the fragilities of the ORs' public sector, particularly hospital care; whereas the Russian invasion of Ukraine has exacerbated the impact of the pandemic, including rising unemployment rates, especially among young people, and rising inflation, namely through the increase in the price of fuel, maritime freight, food, fertilisers and certain raw materials such as cereals for animal feed; whereas the impact of these crises, particularly on employment in the ORs, is not yet fully known;
- S. whereas, owing to the current economic climate, Europe's economies are dealing with labour and raw material shortages and a generalised increase in prices; whereas this situation is taking on a worrying dimension in the ORs;
- T. whereas the Commission considers that economic recovery from COVID-19 will be slower in the ORs when compared to national macroeconomic averages ⁽²²⁾; whereas the EU should support the ORs to help them to respond to the continuous rise in inflation that heavily affects the ORs' primary economic sector;
- U. whereas it is important to increase budget appropriations for the ORs and simplify the procedures necessary to access funding;
- V. whereas air and maritime transport are essential for ensuring territorial continuity and for connecting the ORs to the European mainland, to each other and to the rest of the world, particularly to the countries and territories around them; whereas these regions have no alternatives to these modes of transport, which are more expensive than on the mainland; whereas this dependency has a direct impact on their competitiveness, creating additional costs related to the import and export of goods and services, and on citizens' lives; whereas in the case of archipelagos, double insularity exacerbates these challenges; whereas the ORs depend strongly on the good state of maintenance and the sustainable development of ports, as they play a crucial role in the connectivity, economy and cohesion of these regions; whereas the rules of EU funding instruments and programmes should take better account of the mobility, accessibility and connectivity constraints of the ORs;
- W. whereas the economy of the ORs is intrinsically linked to the primary sector, particularly farming and fisheries, which, in addition to fostering food security and sufficiency, create jobs and help maintain the diversity of these regions' landscapes, ecology and territory;
- X. whereas the primary sector, in particular arable and livestock farming and fishing, is very important for the ORs; whereas the programme of options specifically relating to remoteness and insularity for agriculture (POSEI scheme) is therefore essential for the socio-economic development and territorial cohesion of these regions, as was the former scheme ⁽²³⁾ for compensating certain ORs for additional fisheries costs, commonly known as 'POSEI Fisheries', which has since been incorporated into the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and then into the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF);
- Y. whereas agricultural holdings in outermost regions are challenged by their remote location, limited diversity of production owing to local and climatic conditions and historical developments, a high dependence on local markets, the climate crisis, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and a lack of energy, and often face a lack of fresh and clean water;
- Z. whereas, owing to their specific geographical characteristics, the ORs must be able to aim for food autonomy based on sustainable cycles and energy autonomy via renewables;

⁽²¹⁾ *Relatório anual 2021 — a situação do país em matéria de drogas e toxicodependências*, 2022, p. 20, https://www.sicad.pt/BK/Publicacoes/Lists/SICAD_PUBLICACOES/Attachments/178/RelatorioAnual_2021_%20ASituacaoDoPaisEmMateriaDeDrogasEToxico-dependencias.pdf; *Drogues et addictions dans les outre-mer*, OFDT, 2020, p. 48, <http://www.ofdt.fr/BDD/publications/docs/epfxio2a6.pdf>.

⁽²²⁾ <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2776/541180>.

⁽²³⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32003R2328>.

- AA. whereas the ORs are home to around 80 % of the EU's biodiversity and are characterised by their wealth of natural heritage and ecosystems that are unique in the EU and largely endemic, thus more fragile; whereas the ORs' ecosystems are particularly threatened by the impact of climate change and marine and coastal pollution and are a vulnerable target for illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; whereas they need to be better protected against such threats in order to reduce the negative consequences on employment, the small-scale fisheries sector and local communities; whereas ORs should have access to specific funding to protect their biodiversity;
- AB. whereas the ORs are on the front line when it comes to the effects of climate change, especially as regards rising sea levels and the warming and acidification of the oceans, and are particularly vulnerable in the face of increasingly frequent extreme weather events such as cyclones, tropical storms and floods, as well as seismic activity and volcanic eruptions;
- AC. whereas the risks of major/regional natural disasters and health emergencies have become systemic and the least developed and most fragile territories, such as the ORs, are often the most affected by such catastrophes;
- AD. whereas most ORs are volcanic, and whereas volcanic activity can have a devastating impact on the environment and the economy, as was the case following the eruption on La Palma in the Canary Islands in 2021;
- AE. whereas, generally, the economy in the ORs is not very diverse, relying to a large extent on tourism, and whereas this makes the markets more vulnerable in the event of socio-economic crises and natural disasters;
- AF. whereas in order to combine economic development and the preservation of vulnerable ecosystems, the ORs should make use of their great potential to develop key sectors, such as ecotourism and other subsectors of tourism, sustainable mobility, the circular economy and renewable energies, resulting from their natural location;
- AG. whereas the ORs provide the EU with geostrategic locations in the Indian Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean and the Amazon Basin, and whereas they help make the EU the largest exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the world;
- AH. whereas the ORs are genuine natural laboratories due to their unique biodiversity that makes them crucial to the promotion of research and conservation of marine resources;
- AI. whereas the continuous loss of marine biodiversity will cause major environmental, social and economic impacts in the EU fisheries sector and in particular in the ORs, and must therefore be urgently reversed;
- AJ. whereas marine protected areas (MPAs) need to be established, taking into account public consultations with local authorities and stakeholders, in particular fishers, to ensure the adequate implementation of the EU Common Fisheries Policy and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive; whereas the creation of these areas should be seen as a tool for reconciling the protection of habitats and ecosystems with the socio-economic sustainability of the blue economy;
- AK. whereas the ORs, due to their geographic position, have the ability to lead the blue economy; whereas the ORs are heavily dependent on the blue economy sectors, in particular fisheries and sustainable tourism, for their socio-economic development; whereas the sustainable development of these sectors in these regions could boost job creation and economic growth; whereas coastal and maritime tourism represents 60 % of employment in the blue economy and requires highly qualified and skilled professionals;
- AL. whereas the ORs strengthen the EU's global dimension by extending its borders to various continents, thus enhancing their importance in projecting the EU's values and principles in the regions in which they are embedded; whereas, furthermore, cooperation with their neighbouring countries and with the Member States of which they form part is important for their regional integration and economic development;
- AM. whereas bridging the development divide between the ORs and the rest of the EU must remain a top priority for the EU and the Commission;
- AN. whereas many ORs are faced with strong migratory pressure, with extremely severe consequences for their populations and significant impacts on their own resources;

Better application of Article 349 TFEU

1. Welcomes the visible progress achieved by the EU strategies for the ORs, which is a sign of the fruitful cooperation between the Commission, Parliament and the Council, the ORs' regional and local authorities, and civil society, including NGOs; regrets, nevertheless, the lack of commitment shown by the Commission in this new strategy in essential areas for the ORs, in particular as regards boosting their competitiveness in order to reinforce the EU's position as a major oceanic player; calls for this strategy to be incorporated into the possible mid-term revision of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) and the post-2027 MFF;
2. Stresses how urgent it is to implement many of the measures set out in this strategy, which, in this time of crisis, are of particular importance, with a view to ensuring the sustainable (economic, social, territorial and environmental) recovery of these regions;
3. Recalls that Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) confers on the Commission the role of guardian of the Treaties; emphasises that the ORs are fully integrated into the European Union and assimilated into its legal order, with their specific situation acknowledged by the Treaties, particularly Article 349 TFEU, which establishes a principle and a right of adaptation, addressed at the level of different Union policies;
4. Regrets the fact that Article 349 TFEU is still not being automatically applied in every legislative initiative from the Commission, while recognising that some progress has been made with regard to the need to take account of the specific characteristics of the ORs; takes the view that limited use has been made of this article and that it could be interpreted in a more innovative and positive way, in particular with a view to creating ad hoc programmes and specific new policies; highlights that this article should be applied in a transversal way to Union policies and initiatives, where appropriate, and reiterates the call, made in its resolution of 14 September 2021, for the Commission and the Council to adopt an 'OR reflex', namely for the ORs' specific characteristics to be systematically taken into account in EU legislative proposals and during interinstitutional negotiations, including, where appropriate, by conducting dedicated impact assessments, with a view to ensuring that EU legislation responds to the specific challenges and local realities of the ORs; recommends that the Commission consider an OR proofing mechanism similar to the one proposed for rural areas;
5. Underlines the need to apply Article 349 with a view to increasing investment in the ORs by the Union, the Member States, local authorities and private and public actors, avoiding any negative approach, in other words, specific measures that would hinder the process of making up for underdevelopment and the reduction in development disparities;
6. Calls, in the context of the forthcoming Convention for reforming the European Union Treaties, for the imperative safeguarding of the current specific status of the ORs — Articles 355(1), 349 and 107(3)(a) of the TFEU — or, if appropriate, its extension;
7. Points out that the Court of Justice has emphasised that 'the conditions of application of the Treaties', within the meaning of Article 349 TFEU, must be construed as covering both the conditions relating to the application of primary EU law and those relating to the application of acts of secondary legislation adopted on the basis of that primary law; points out, furthermore, that the Court has ruled that it follows from the wording and the objectives of Article 349 TFEU and from the scheme of the Treaties that, as regards the ORs, the territorial scope of the entire *acquis* of EU law is defined in particular by Article 52 TEU read in conjunction with Article 355(1) TFEU and by the measures adopted pursuant to Article 349 TFEU;
8. Reaffirms the need to maintain and strengthen coordinated action at EU, national, regional and local level; supports the full involvement of regional and local authorities of the ORs in the design of EU policies; stresses that this involvement brings benefits to all interested parties and reinforces the legitimacy of the EU decision-making process; underlines that such a bottom-up approach allows each region to defend its best interests; highlights, in this regard, the positive contributions of the Conference of Presidents of the Outermost Regions in identifying priorities and challenges faced by these regions and in incentivising further action, including sharing of best practices; recalls the important work carried out by the Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms to defend the interests of the ORs within the College of Commissioners; proposes, with that in mind, that the next Commission continue and strengthen the monitoring of the sustainable and inclusive development of the ORs, for their benefit, at the highest level, particularly by measuring the progress made within the Commission on the full application of Article 349;

9. Reiterates the need to consider the specific features of the ORs in every annual cycle of the European Semester and for those features to be reflected in the country-specific recommendations for Portugal, Spain and France;
10. Invites the Commission to make full use of the tools of the European Semester and the country-specific recommendations to analyse and advise on public policies in the ORs with the aim of achieving upward social convergence;
11. Considers that the EU should be more ambitious in deepening integrated policies for the ORs, through a proactive and consistent EU approach and through clear and robust support for the sustainable endogenous development of each of these regions;
12. Calls on the Commission to replicate the POSEI model in other economic sectors of the ORs, with fisheries, transport, connectivity, energy and digital transition being priority areas; stresses that these specific measures are fundamental to the promotion of the sustainable green and blue economies in the ORs;
13. Welcomes the Commission's commitment to stepping up dialogue with the ORs and providing them with individualised support, but regrets the fact that the Commission's communication only partially addresses some of the concerns of these regions; calls on the Commission to adopt an action plan for this strategy and notes that this must have specific and adequate financial allocations, take into account the characteristics, assets and challenges of each OR and include an individual action plan for each OR if the ORs so request; believes that the action plan for the strategy should be based on a bottom-up-approach and a multi-level governance framework; stresses that the Commission should work with the Member States, the regional and local authorities and the populations concerned by means of public consultations, and should provide further support and/or consultancy tools, including at the request of the authorities of the regions themselves; calls for these action plans to be published before the proposals for the new post-2027 programming period are put forward;
14. Calls for the impacts of the current crisis in the ORs to be taken into account in the revision of the MFF 2021-2027;
15. Calls on DG REGIO, in its monitoring activities, to take into account the specific difficulties that the ORs encounter, in particular with regard to calls for tender and the time-limits for obtaining information from beneficiaries of the structural funds;
16. Recommends that Member States with ORs sign up to this strategy, thereby guaranteeing territorial, social and economic cohesion for these regions;
17. Reiterates the need to reassess the rules on State aid for companies in the ORs; draws attention in this regard to the ongoing revision of the *De Minimis* Regulation and the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market, which sets very low thresholds; calls for a significant increase of the *de minimis* and GBER thresholds and a positive differentiation for ORs to take into account the additional operating costs faced by enterprises located in the ORs;
18. Recalls that the ORs suffer from structural and permanent disadvantages because of their insularity and remoteness; calls on the Commission to exclude payments to offset insularity and remoteness, particularly in the transport sector, when calculating State aid;
19. Underlines the importance of ensuring the continuity of all existing tax regimes in the ORs, given their impact on the local economies;
20. Stresses the need to produce up-to-date, harmonised data on the ORs so that the impact of European policies can be properly ascertained; advocates breaking Eurostat data down by OR;

21. Considers that for ORs to feel that they are a true part of the EU and fully embedded in the EU's political action, the EU should be more politically proactive and deliver specific measures to foster the sustainable growth of the ORs;

Investing in people

22. Welcomes the Commission's focus on 'putting people first'; recalls, however, that the rates of persons at risk of poverty in the ORs are among the highest in the Union⁽²⁴⁾; recalls, furthermore, that the ORs' GDP per inhabitant is significantly below the EU and their respective national averages⁽²⁵⁾ and that Mayotte is one of the poorest regions in the EU, with a GDP per inhabitant that is 30 % of the EU average; urges the Commission and the Member States to do their utmost to ensure access to essential services in these regions, as this is the key factor in combating poverty and social exclusion; recalls the Member States' commitment to fully support the development of the ORs with the necessary investments, particularly in the poorest areas; underlines the importance of implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights in the ORs in order to ensure greater solidarity between the generations, promote social protection and inclusion, and create high-quality jobs in line with the green and digital transitions;

23. Stresses the need to take measures to promote and support the establishment of teachers, particularly in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, which are important to accompany the twin transitions, to ensure literacy in these areas and to stimulate young people's interest in them;

24. Points out that there is still a considerable need for social housing in the ORs, the infrastructure of which should also meet a series of sustainability requirements, in line with the targets for achieving climate neutrality; takes the view that such requirements should neither impair the fight against inequalities nor impair social justice in these regions, and that it is therefore incumbent on the EU Member States and regional authorities to encourage the creation of and provide the necessary instruments;

25. Supports the creation of a pilot project for a simplified, direct-access EU programme aimed at private social support institutions in the ORs, with non-repayable funding lines for small-scale projects, support for training for technical and auxiliary staff in the different areas of intervention, co-financing for large-scale projects involving cross-border partnerships and support for initiatives to share best practices;

26. Calls on the Commission to organise a social summit in the ORs to discuss and implement the Porto targets and the European Pillar of Social Rights in these territories; stresses the importance of including stakeholders from the ORs in order to ensure the ownership and proper implementation of social policies;

27. Calls on the Commission to work with the relevant Member States on the creation and development of 'employment-focused areas' in the ORs, including through free zones, with a view to supporting economic recovery, job creation and skills development in these regions, particularly for young people and women; stresses that such areas should focus on the most fragile and/or most promising sectors, while safeguarding decent working conditions and applicable occupational health and safety rules; stresses the need to boost local markets, promote the production of local products, enhance the sustainability of economic activities, including tourism, and increase the capacity to foster economic innovation;

28. Stresses that the economic and labour market support measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the easing of the State aid regime, the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU) and the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) and CRII+ packages have prevented further job losses; stresses that there is a need for a thorough evaluation of the national policies and support programmes that have been deployed in the ORs to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment, in order to identify effective instruments for continued and future use;

⁽²⁴⁾ 37,8 % in the Canary Islands, 27,5 % in the Azores and 29,2 % in Madeira in 2021, as shown in the dataset 'Persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion by NUTS regions' for 2021 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_peps11n/default/table?lang=en.

⁽²⁵⁾ The Commission staff working document of 3 May 2022 entitled 'Outermost regions at a glance — assets, challenges and opportunities' (SWD(2022)0133) shows that the GDP in purchasing power standards per inhabitant percentage in the ORs in 2020 was 60 % of the EU-27 average: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/outermost-regions/rup-2022/comm-rup-2022-glance_en.pdf.

29. Stresses the importance of the European Employment Services Network (EURES) and draws particular attention to the priority needs of the labour market in EURES activities, in order to help the unemployed back into employment and to facilitate the free movement of workers to the ORs;

30. Emphasises the important role played by the social economy in the ORs, as a partner of the regional and local authorities in combating the constraints linked to remoteness, poverty and social exclusion, and in creating jobs and developing initiatives in these regions; calls on the Commission to ensure the participation of the ORs in the European Social Economy Regions network;

31. Deplores the unemployment, school-drop-out and poverty rates in the ORs, which are in an extremely fragile situation compared with other EU territories, aggravated by the current context of multiple and complex crises, a situation that requires greater European solidarity;

32. Calls on the Commission and the Council to make full and optimal use of the funding available under the MFF 2021-2027 without prejudice to the programmes already established under the ESF+, following structural problems related to youth unemployment and poverty; recalls that the ORs are particularly affected by these issues and therefore need specific support;

33. Highlights the difficulties encountered in attracting and retaining professionals in certain areas; calls, therefore, for specific measures to provide effective solutions to address this problem, including through an additional budgetary envelope for the ESF+;

34. Welcomes, in this respect, the availability of funds under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) for measures dedicated to children and young people and expects this to lead to significant opportunities being created for young people in Europe; calls for social partners and youth organisations to be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the national recovery and resilience plans; calls on the Member States to ensure that the just transition fund and the ESF+ support integrated plans at local level to help upskilling and reskilling, in particular for the most vulnerable groups affected by the transition;

35. Recalls that young people make up a high proportion of the ORs' population; underlines the importance of young people for the revitalisation of traditional sectors in the ORs, such as fisheries, given that a competitive, resilient and socially fair fisheries sector needs qualified and skilled professionals; calls on the Commission and the Member States to attract young people into the primary sector through the provision of new job opportunities and related funding and through measures that improve labour conditions, such as specific training courses, fair and adequate salaries, and gender equality and work-life balance measures; calls on the Member States to facilitate access to land for young farmers in the ORs; stresses the importance of developing green skills and sustainable employment opportunities in a carbon-neutral, energy-efficient and circular economy;

36. Stresses that the informal economy is widespread in the ORs, which makes it difficult to analyse employment figures accurately and to implement social policies effectively; calls on the Commission and the Member States to combat undeclared work, for example, by means of incentive systems and simplified declaration tools;

37. Calls on the Commission to create enhanced opportunities for mobility through a blue and green Erasmus, based on the Erasmus+ model, to enable young people to take advantage of the opportunities, in terms of training and new professions, created within the blue economy sectors, the circular economy and the green transition more generally;

38. Stresses that it is crucial to increase the ORs' participation in Erasmus+ and underlines that the Commission and the national entities should pay special attention to the ORs' potential to host young people on mobility schemes in these sectors, in particular through targeted communication and specific support campaigns for receiving and sending participants; welcomes the fact that the Commission will use Interreg to further develop regional learning mobility programmes in synergy with Erasmus+; calls, further, on the Commission and the relevant agencies to develop cooperation partnerships with non-EU countries neighbouring the ORs under the Erasmus+ programme in order to further promote university exchanges and business exchanges with the ORs;

39. Calls, further, on the Commission to work with the Member States and the Erasmus+ national agencies to ensure better protection and support for young people from the ORs taking part in the Erasmus mobility programme in other parts of the EU, in accordance with Chapter V on inclusion of the Regulation establishing Erasmus+ ⁽²⁶⁾, especially through pre-financing for mobility, additional specific subsidies and enhanced support;

40. Calls for greater participation by young people from the ORs in the voluntary work and local solidarity projects made possible by the European Solidarity Corps;

41. Supports the promotion of active ageing measures in these regions, such as broadening the scope for the 'sport' actions of the Erasmus+ programme to include initiatives promoting physical activity for older people and intergenerational sporting activities; supports, furthermore, as part of a lifelong learning approach, incentives to set up a European network of senior universities in the ORs, with specific learning tools and access to information, sharing best practices and student exchanges;

42. Calls on the Commission to support either the Member States or the ORs, or both, as applicable, in developing an action plan, as soon as possible, to combat early school leaving in the ORs, as well as to address the root causes of this problem and to encourage the exchange of good practices in order to achieve concrete solutions; emphasises the 'second-chance school' model, supported by the ESF, which has proven effective in getting early school leavers back into training and employment; calls for the launch of pilot projects in the ORs focusing not only on these concerns, but also on the blue economy and training, as well as supporting innovation and research, in order to give these regions a lead position in ocean governance;

43. Highlights that the promotion of training and certification in the ORs can create more highly qualified and skilled professionals who are normally more attentive and open to implementing behavioural changes, such as more openness to the use of new technologies; recalls that the digital transition and the use of new technologies should be duly accompanied by proper training for all, local and regional authorities and civil society;

44. Calls on the Commission to effectively promote the participation of the ORs' citizens, especially young people, in European programmes and to reinforce its information campaigns in remote places;

45. Is of the opinion that entrepreneurship can create employment opportunities in the ORs; regrets, in this sense, that the call for proposals entitled 'Empowering youth in the EU Outermost Regions' did not have the expected participation levels; calls for improved communication campaigns on such proposals, defends extending the initiative to people up to the age of 30, and urges local and regional authorities to provide more information on current specific initiatives for the ORs, and for young people in particular, supported by the EU;

46. Stresses that the social situation of young people is a central concern in the ORs and welcomes the Commission's commitment to using the ESF+ to improve the education, training, mobility and employment of young people; calls, therefore, on the Commission to develop specific actions on training, learning, development and skills-conversion in these regions, particularly as part of the European Year of Skills in 2023, and to ensure that the reinforced Youth Guarantee is properly deployed in their territories; underlines the importance of setting up apprenticeship programmes and vocational

⁽²⁶⁾ Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 (OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 1).

guidance services for young people using EU funds, in particular the ESF+, and calls on employers to enhance the provision of more effective apprenticeships in line with the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships; stresses, in this sense, the importance of programmes for the validation of acquired experience in the context of lifelong learning;

47. Welcomes the creation of the Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve (ALMA) initiative for the active inclusion of disadvantaged young people; stresses that this initiative is of particular interest in the ORs, where there are many NEETs; calls on the Commission to ensure that this initiative is accompanied by adequate financial resources to ensure the largest possible number of beneficiaries; believes that positive action should be taken to ensure the participation of young people from the ORs;

48. Underlines the need to define strategies to combat the brain drain and increase the attractiveness of the ORs, especially for young people; highlights, therefore, the particular relevance of the Commission communication of 17 January 2023 entitled 'Harnessing talent in Europe's regions' ⁽²⁷⁾ for the ORs; advocates, in this context, increasing support and assistance for higher education institutions in these regions, as well as for their vocational schools, so that they can better equip themselves and enhance the quality of the range of training they offer; calls on the Commission and the Member States to work with local stakeholders, including the private sector, universities, civil society organisations and local authorities, to establish digital one-stop shops in order to help young jobseekers; highlights the need to develop and diversify employment opportunities that enable decent living standards;

49. Stresses the need to ensure gender equality, as well as the social, economic and political empowerment of women in the ORs, including through cohesion policy, by promoting access to quality jobs with equal pay and fair remuneration; stresses the importance of affordable childcare, as well as of combating discrimination, gender-based violence and sexual harassment, particularly in the workplace; stresses, further, the need to promote women's participation in the labour market in order to boost employment rates;

50. Stresses that the effective implementation of the European Child Guarantee is crucial to combating child poverty in the ORs, particularly as regards guaranteeing their access to healthcare and breaking the vicious circle of intergenerational poverty; calls on the Member States to include specific measures for the ORs in their national implementation plans for the European Child Guarantee and their revision; highlights the importance of school canteens to ensure that children in the ORs receive proper nutrition and, in many cases, to ensure that they have regular meals; reaffirms, therefore, the importance of the EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme, which should take the vulnerability of these regions into account; calls, in particular, for the school scheme national strategies to be adapted to better respond to the ORs' needs;

51. Stresses that the ageing population, the increase in average life expectancy and the decline in the birth rate are also of concern in the ORs, as they result in a shrinking labour force and significant challenges for social security systems; believes in the benefits of creating intergenerational links that could be enhanced through mentoring programmes in order to strengthen knowledge sharing and individualised support for young people and job seekers; notes that the ORs would be suitable territories for developing innovative social policies such as a 'third chance pathway' aimed at the social and labour market reintegration of working people of all ages or the care of the elderly, given the ageing population; urges national, regional and local authorities in charge of education and lifelong learning, as well as social partners, to put in place a legal framework to encourage companies to invest in programmes and measures that aim to guarantee professional integration and to promote the inclusion of vulnerable groups that may need additional targeted measures;

52. Calls on the Commission to focus on prevention, social reintegration and the return to employment in the implementation of the EU drugs strategy; calls on the Commission to study the possibilities of European funding for therapeutic centres in the ORs, aimed at the care and rehabilitation of drug addicts and their reintegration into the labour market; warns that new addictions have been found in the ORs, particularly the rise in synthetic drug use that poses serious risks to young people's mental health, which deserves special attention ⁽²⁸⁾;

⁽²⁷⁾ COM(2023)0032.

⁽²⁸⁾ *Relatório anual 2021 — a situação do país em matéria de drogas e toxicodependências*, 2022, p. 20, https://www.sicad.pt/BK/Publicacoes/Lists/SICAD_PUBLICACOES/Attachments/178/RelatorioAnual_2021_%20ASituacaoDoPaisEmMateriaDeDrogasEToxicodependencias.pdf.

53. Emphasises the importance of having a well-coordinated, humanitarian, effective and safe EU migration policy, which takes into account the specific realities of the ORs, particularly those dealing with the significant consequences of large and sustained arrivals of migrants; draws particular attention to the needs of ORs dealing with migration, including of people in vulnerable situations such as unaccompanied minors, as is the case in the Canary Islands, which have specific needs for supporting their social inclusion;

54. Insists on the need for the EU to provide appropriate and tailored funding to manage these specific migration challenges and suggests that the resources of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) be mobilised to provide adequate support to Member States' efforts in the area of migration; calls, in this regard, for territorialised measures to facilitate ORs' access to AMIF; advocates the launching of pilot projects for integration, inclusion, training and service provision in those areas of the ORs that are experiencing a high number of arrivals; calls on the Commission to ensure that relevant Member States' programmes under the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy provide for adequate support to ORs;

55. Underlines the importance of helping the ORs to manage irregular migration at their borders; calls on the Commission and the Member States to consider the possibility of requesting operational support from EU agencies, including in Mayotte and French Guiana, in order to assist local authorities, particularly in places with the largest number of irregular arrivals of migrants;

56. Calls for the implementation of Directive 2001/55/EC⁽²⁹⁾ and the new measures introduced by the CARE Regulation⁽³⁰⁾ in order to ensure genuine solidarity in responding to migration flows from conflict-affected areas in particular;

Ocean governance and the potential of the blue economy in the ORs

57. Urges the Commission to take the ORs as the European Union benchmark in the fields of ocean governance, ocean knowledge, the blue economy and fishing;

58. Recalls that the ORs' fishing fleet is old and, in certain cases, very degraded, which constitutes a danger for fishers and for the environment; stresses the need to continue investing in modernising the fishing fleet, including the traditional small-scale fishing fleet, in order to improve safety and working conditions for fishers, attract new people, particularly young people, to the fishing sector, reduce CO₂ emissions, and improve the storage and conservation conditions of captures; highlights that these measures are crucial for the fisheries sector to be able to continue, safely and securely, to provide healthy food and for enabling a shift towards food autonomy in these regions, with a less negative environmental impact;

59. Regrets the fact that the EMFAF still does not support the renovation of fleets by covering the purchase of new vessels; recalls that the EMFAF comprises provisions for Member States' action plans for the ORs, including structural support for the fisheries and aquaculture sector; recalls that the EMFAF allows for support for the acquisition of fishing vessels for young fishers;

60. Urges the Commission and the Member States to work together more closely to swiftly unlock funds to renew fishing fleets in the ORs, taking into account the balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities in the ORs, and to support the green and digital transitions of these regions' fisheries sectors with the help of low-impact fishing techniques; calls on the Commission to reassess the ecological, economic and technical indicators set to arrive at a balance between fleet capacity and fishing opportunities, taking into account the particular characteristics of the ORs, and to allow support for the artisanal fish aggregation devices anchored in the ORs when revising its guidelines on State aid for the fisheries and aquaculture sectors; stresses, furthermore, the need to speed up the collection of the scientific data needed in the ORs;

⁽²⁹⁾ Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof (OJ L 212, 7.8.2001, p. 12).

⁽³⁰⁾ Regulation (EU) 2022/562 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 April 2022 amending Regulations (EU) No 1303/2013 and (EU) No 223/2014 as regards Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE) (OJ L 109, 8.4.2022, p. 1).

61. Recalls that the Commission has pledged to write an interim report on the EMFAF chapter on the ORs and to analyse the ORs' need for an autonomous regulation for fisheries; calls on the Commission to establish a specific financial operational programme for the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the ORs post-2027, similar in functioning to the POSEI programme; points out that such a scheme should seek to offset the extra costs and structural difficulties faced by fishers in the ORs while financing structural investments to help develop the sector;

62. Points out that the EU owes its status as the world's leading maritime power to a large extent to the EEZs in the ORs; regrets the fact that the EMFAF lays insufficient emphasis on maritime affairs in this regard and calls for this aspect to be strengthened;

63. Defends the importance of effectively compensating the ORs' fishers for their efforts to meet the Commission's goal of protecting 30 % of the EU's marine areas by 2030; considers that the marine protected areas should be a tool for reconciling the protection of habitats and ecosystems with the socio-economic viability of the fisheries sector;

64. Points out that defining protected marine areas has allowed local fishers to increase their income, leading to an increase in local employment in the fisheries sector and to an increase in recreational activities, boosting opportunities for growth in sectors such as sustainable tourism; underlines that, if properly created, with due public consultation with local authorities and stakeholders, in particular fishers, the definition of these protected areas is fundamental for the protection and the recovery of species, as well as for the coastal sectors that depend on them ⁽³¹⁾;

65. Points out that the ORs are particularly affected by the effects of climate change, marine pollution and illegal fishing; stresses the role that the ORs could play in combating illegal fishing and ocean pollution, in conserving marine biodiversity and in the transition to a sustainable blue economy;

66. Welcomes the Commission's suggestion to issue a call for proposals on strategies for promoting the blue economy in the ORs and urges the Commission once again to put this call into action as soon as possible; stresses, in this regard, the key role played by the fishing and aquaculture sectors in the sustainable socio-economic development of the ORs; urges the Commission and the Member States to take all necessary measures to address the causes of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, pollution and climate change in the ORs, owing to their contribution to severe loss of marine biodiversity, and to reform their sectoral policies accordingly; asks the Commission to fund sustainable investments to address the massive proliferation of Sargassum seaweed, which is particularly affecting these regions, with serious negative environmental and socio-economic consequences; calls, further, on the Commission to set up a European centre in the Autonomous Region of Madeira to fight marine pollution by plastic;

67. Highlights the importance of collaborative, inclusive and cross-sectoral maritime spatial planning in the ORs that takes socio-economic, environmental and biodiversity concerns into account;

Agriculture as one of the ORs' pillars of development

68. Considers that POSEI should be maintained as a permanent EU programme linked to the common agricultural policy (CAP) and funded from EU resources; recalls that the budget allocation for the POSEI agriculture scheme has neither been increased since 2009, nor has it been updated for inflation, which has resulted in chronic underfunding, aggravated by the fact that the population in several ORs is increasing steadily; regrets also the fact that there has been no POSEI allocation increase in response to Mayotte becoming an OR; believes that this increase should occur as soon as possible and regrets that the ORs have been unfavourably treated in revisions of agricultural support funding; advocates, therefore, a significant increase in the current allocations for the POSEI agriculture scheme, including aid supplied under the specific supply arrangements, in the context of the MFF mid-term review or in the post-2027 MFF, to better support local production in the ORs in the face of rising extra costs, and to consolidate and enhance resilience in supply chains, but also to support agricultural diversification efforts, including for local consumption, in order to help the ORs achieve greater food autonomy; believes that this increase should take account of all the factors mentioned above; calls on the Commission to

⁽³¹⁾ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU\(2022\)733087](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU(2022)733087).

keep the POSEI and rural development measures closely aligned, given the strong interdependence between the two types of support; considers that it is of fundamental importance to keep improving complementarity, transparency and coherence between POSEI and other EU funds;

69. Calls for POSEI to be used to recognise and promote regional crops and products as part of the historical and cultural heritage and identity of the outermost regions;

70. Argues that the ORs should continue to design, implement and manage their own rural development measures, for which purpose a regionalised structure is therefore essential, so that regions can continue (particularly from 2028) to develop their own measures, with a regional management authority, as well as regional monitoring committees; calls for a direct communication channel to be established between the regional governments and the Commission so that the CAP is implemented and enforced appropriately, efficiently and effectively;

71. Reiterates the need to restore co-financing rates for the ORs to 85 % in the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which is vital for family farms and small farmers;

72. Advocates an increase in the financial envelope for promoting products from the ORs and a 90 % co-financing rate for such promotional campaigns;

73. Stresses that the outermost regions are frequently subject to adverse climatic events that are instrumental in altering the landscape, resulting in smaller farm sizes, which likewise leads to higher production costs and prevents economies of scale from being made; urges the Commission, in view of meeting these challenges, to allocate coupled support to local producers to strengthen the entire value chain in difficult circumstances like these, in parallel with a rapid adjustment of financing procedures in the event of serious adverse circumstances;

74. Stresses the importance of integrated territorial development in the outermost regions, such as community coordination of investment and local development, and the promotion of initiatives such as 'smart villages' to support sustainable agriculture and sustainable food production;

75. Welcomes the Commission commitment under its communication on a long-term vision for rural areas⁽³²⁾ to include analysis of the outermost regions within the EU Rural Observatory's scope; considers that the Rural Observatory could be a valuable resource to identify data gaps and improve statistical databases on the outermost regions, which would provide a full picture capturing the needs of their rural population;

76. Stresses that the implementation of the new biodiversity strategy in the outermost regions must be coordinated with efforts to strengthen the sustainable development of the agricultural and forestry sectors and take into account the specific geographical and climatic features of these regions; highlights that in these remote regions, farming is the mainstay of the local economy, and the Commission's 'green' requirements may hinder farmers' competitiveness; recalls that the Commission has stated that 'the progress towards the targets will be under constant review, and adjustment if needed, to mitigate against undue impact on biodiversity, food security and farmers' competitiveness'⁽³³⁾; calls for increased support to be given to farmers to develop agro-ecological and biodiversity-friendly practices, including through higher funding and co-financing rates; calls on the Member States to make the best use of the funds available under the LIFE programme;

77. Stresses that the outermost regions are home to ecosystems with high ecological value, but that this should not be seen as a threat to the balanced development of productive work in the agricultural sector;

78. Notes that the proposal for a farm to fork strategy requests that the EU further limit the use of plant protection products; stresses, in this context, that the specific characteristics of the tropical and subtropical climates in the outermost regions must be taken into account; stresses that some outermost regions are located in tropical, subtropical and humid equatorial environments, which are particularly conducive to the development of diseases, and that they are therefore at a serious disadvantage, in relation to the continent and third countries, in terms of covering their needs for plant protection

⁽³²⁾ Commission communication of 10 June 2021 entitled 'A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas — Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040' (COM(2021)0345).

⁽³³⁾ Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 — Bringing nature back into our lives' (COM(2020)0380).

products to fight against pests; highlights the need therefore to promote research, with increased funding, on new alternative solutions adapted to these territories in order to safeguard agricultural production and ensure farmers' viability in the outermost regions; highlights, in this context, the importance of promoting agro-ecological practices and the application of innovative production techniques, including new genomics techniques; notes the difficulty of accessing certain agricultural inputs in some outermost regions, especially environmentally friendly ones; insists that there should be no access to the EU market for products that do not comply with EU standards and may endanger food and health security and safety throughout the EU, such as bananas from third countries that use massive quantities of plant protection agents that are not authorised in the EU;

79. Calls on the Commission to regulate new genomic techniques (NGT) in order to respond as quickly as possible to the need to reduce and find alternatives to the use of plant protection products with a view to the transition to agroecology;

80. Points out that the use of new technologies, such as a successful extension of high-capacity digital networks and precision farming, can facilitate the transformation towards more efficient, modern and competitive agriculture, saving costs, improving performance and minimising environmental impact;

81. Stresses the need to support remunerative and environmentally friendly short supply chains and the development of a farming sector that prioritises high value-added traditional products, local consumption and green solutions;

82. Reiterates that food autonomy remains a priority for the ORs and that, while putting traditional sectors on a stable footing, the diversification of production also needs to be stepped up and supported;

83. Stresses the importance of the structure of local sectors in guaranteeing food security in the outermost regions, which are often isolated, and encourages stakeholders and public policymakers to make use of all the provisions of the common organisation of the markets (CMO), including the provisions specific to the outermost regions; welcomes the adaptation of certain provisions of the CMO to the specific needs of outermost regions, and asks the Commission to provide, if necessary, for further adjustments in the context of the next revision of the CMO; calls on the Commission to study the feasibility and advisability of extending the provisions laid down in Article 22a of Regulation (EU) No 228/2013 on POSEI programmes⁽³⁴⁾ to all outermost regions, in relation to extending the rules and contributions of inter-branch organisations to operators who are not members of these organisations, with the aim of ensuring food security and self-sufficiency;

84. Notes that milk and related upstream and downstream products constitute one of the fundamental pillars of the economy of the Autonomous Region of the Azores; recognises that their socio-economic importance and the number of direct and indirect jobs and services they provide are indispensable for ensuring economic and social cohesion;

85. Considers that in recent years, producers in the outermost regions, like tens of thousands of milk producers across the EU, have been forced to abandon production because of the ruinous prices paid to producers, which do not compensate for production costs; takes the view that the situation affecting milk production is inseparable from the liberalisation of the milk market and the end of production quotas, and that it can only be resolved by means of mechanisms to regulate the markets;

86. Recalls the joint declaration by Parliament, the Council and the Commission annexed to Regulation (EU) 2017/540⁽³⁵⁾ on the stabilisation mechanism for bananas, which was revised when Ecuador joined the EU-Colombia/Peru Trade Agreement, which states: '[the] Commission will continue to carry out regular analyses of the state of the market and the situation of Union banana producers after expiry of the stabilisation mechanism. If a serious deterioration in the state of

⁽³⁴⁾ Regulation (EU) No 228/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 March 2013 laying down specific measures for agriculture in the outermost regions of the Union and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 247/2006 (OJ L 78, 20.3.2013, p. 23).

⁽³⁵⁾ Regulation (EU) 2017/540 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 amending Regulation (EU) No 19/2013 implementing the bilateral safeguard clause and the stabilisation mechanism for bananas of the Trade Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Colombia and Peru, of the other part, and amending Regulation (EU) No 20/2013 implementing the bilateral safeguard clause and the stabilisation mechanism for bananas of the Agreement establishing an Association between the European Union and its Member States, on the one hand, and Central America on the other (OJ L 88, 31.3.2017, p. 1).

the market or the situation of Union banana producers is found to have occurred, given the importance of the banana sector for outermost regions, the Commission will examine the situation, together with the Member States and the stakeholders, and decide whether appropriate measures should be considered. The Commission could also convene regular monitoring meetings with the Member States and the stakeholders'; reminds the Commission of its commitment to halt the gradual reduction of the customs tariff by permanently ring-fencing the residual tariff of EUR 75/tonne applicable to third countries with which the EU has signed trade agreements;

87. Highlights that, while no duties apply to direct imports from third countries into the outermost regions of agricultural products that are essential for human consumption, for the manufacture of other products or as agricultural inputs, in implementing this 'specific supply arrangement', account should be taken in particular of the need to ensure that existing local production is neither destabilised, nor obstructed in its development;

88. Points out that uncompetitive prices and a lack of competition in the ORs' transport sectors, particularly in freight transport, is placing constraints on their agricultural sectors;

89. Highlights the lack of sustainable solutions for transporting agricultural products between most islands and the mainland and for exporting and importing agricultural products from and towards islands, and calls on the Commission and the Member States to support innovative projects for greener connections into their development plans for the islands;

90. Recalls that the ORs, with small and distant islands, archipelagic conditions and remoteness, are strongly dependent on maritime transport; cautions, therefore, that changes to the current provisions regarding animal transport have stronger impacts on these regions, in particular given the importance of agriculture to their economies and their dependence on it; insists that, pursuant to Article 349 TFEU, the special characteristics and constraints of the ORs in this regard should be taken into account in the context of the forthcoming review of European rules on animal welfare; points out that continuous efforts must be made to reduce the need for the transport of live animals, in line with the conclusions of its Committee of Inquiry on the Protection of Animals during Transport, and to give importance to the transport of alternatives to live animals;

Mobility, transport and tourism

91. Supports the creation of a specific financial operational programme for transport and connectivity in the ORs, a 'POSEI transport scheme', similar to the POSEI for agriculture and in addition to structural funds, in order to offset the extra costs resulting from remoteness and/or insularity, given the need for territorial continuity within the ORs and the structural challenges they face in terms of transport infrastructure, mobility and digital connectivity; underlines the importance of this scheme for these regions, as is the case of the Azores archipelago, which suffers from 'double insularity' — its remoteness from the mainland and the distance between the islands — which significantly increases the transport costs for people and goods in transit between the islands and between the islands and the mainland, with the obvious effect of increasing the costs of production inputs;

92. Recalls that stability in the transport sector and adequate infrastructure in the ORs is fundamental for their key sectors such as tourism, agriculture and fisheries; points out, too, that it is the ports, airports, shipping routes and regular flight connections that connect the ORs to continental Europe, surrounding countries and the rest of the world; stresses, in this regard, that the Commission needs to consider the significance of transport and connectivity for the ORs entirely in the light of Article 349 TFEU; reiterates, therefore, that any weakening of the transport sector in the ORs increases the risk of isolation, of an economic slowdown and of increasing living costs; believes that competition cannot be the only principle applied to the maritime and air transport sectors of the ORs;

93. Highlights the difficulties faced by the outermost regions in accessing the opportunities offered by the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF); asks that the Commission give an account in the context of a mid-term evaluation of the projects that have applied for CEF funding in the ORs and consider the possibility of creating a specific budget line for the ORs within the CEF;

94. Calls on the Commission to issue calls for proposals specifically relating to ORs within the EU programmes managed by it, such as the CEF, as well as carrying out other actions in these regions, such as information days and road shows, to promote existing opportunities for the ORs;

95. Welcomes the Commission's proposal to revise the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Regulation⁽³⁶⁾; highlights the benefits associated with the trans-European transport network (TEN-T), particularly in terms of connectivity and access to funding; calls on the Commission and the Member States, where it is in the interest of the ORs, to encourage the integration of more of the ORs' infrastructure into the TEN-T core or comprehensive networks in the scope of this revision, in order for this infrastructure to become eligible for support from the CEF, with the corresponding maximum co-financing rate of 70 %, and to become part of the European transport corridors, and for the ORs to benefit from support for, inter alia, alternative fuel supply infrastructure, the extension and maintenance of ports, urban mobility, aviation and the road network;

96. Regrets the fact that many people in these regions lack basic services, including access to public transport, which has knock-on effects for accessing other services, education and economic opportunities; points out the need to work on developing efficient public transport systems in the ORs that are adapted to local conditions; highlights the need to diversify the ORs' internal modes of transport and their infrastructures, in order to promote sustainable mobility that protects the environment and guarantees air quality; recalls that infrastructure for cycling or electric charging points would help ORs reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution and support them in their sustainable transition; calls on the Commission to develop, in close cooperation with local and regional authorities, pilot projects and preparatory actions modelled on policies and initiatives such as sustainable urban mobility plans (for urban mobility) and smart rural transport areas (for rural mobility) that aim to bring stakeholders together in order to create meaningful and consistent sustainable transport options for citizens and visitors alike;

97. Calls on the Commission to examine the possibility of special treatment for the ORs with regard to State aid for airport, port and road infrastructure that has a purely local impact and does not create any distortion of intra-community competition;

98. Stresses the crucial role of sustainable tourism for the development of the ORs, which are highly exposed to climate change effects, natural disasters and health emergencies; urges the Commission to develop a truly European and sustainable tourism policy, in particular by creating a single label for sustainable tourism; highlights that the ORs need to put in place measures towards sustainable tourism, ensuring that they make the most of their natural capital, upgrading their tourism offer while at the same time protecting their environment and biodiversity;

99. Underlines the importance of using EU funding to develop resilient and sustainable tourism in the face of any future crisis, as these regions rely heavily on tourism for their economic, social and cultural development; calls on the Commission, the Member States and the regional and local authorities to ensure contingency plans in vital sectors for the ORs, such as tourism and transport, to better deal with possible future crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed some of the fragilities of these regions; calls on the Commission to create a dedicated funding line for tourism in the next MFF and to provide funds for the tourism ecosystem in the Union's annual budgets;

100. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to launch further measures to promote the recovery of the tourism sector in the ORs and to promote its digital and environmental transformation, with a particular focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and on the regions most dependent on tourism; calls on the Commission and the Member States to use existing EU funds to set up pilot projects for outermost region destinations in the tourism sector, including projects aimed at developing new professions linked to blue and green tourism; calls on the Commission, therefore, to develop initiatives for nautical and coastal tourism, in particular the development and dissemination of a network of maritime routes for such initiatives; calls, further, on the Commission to follow up on the transition pathway for tourism and present a set of binding and concrete actions and interim targets for ORs, including in the areas of research and innovation, infrastructure, technology development and skills, in order to ultimately allow the sector to reach the goal of climate neutrality;

101. Calls on the Commission to set up a European tourism agency with antennas in each of the ORs' geographical areas, thus drawing on the experience and dynamism of the sector in these regions for the benefit of the entire EU, in keeping with the final declaration of the 26th Conference of Presidents of the Outermost Regions of the European Union;

⁽³⁶⁾ Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network and repealing Decision No 661/2010/EU (OJ L 348, 20.12.2013, p. 1).

102. Emphasises that the ORs enrich the European Union's cultural and linguistic heritage; underlines that the cultural sector in the ORs has been hit harder by the recent health and economic crises than in the regions of mainland Europe; calls on the Commission to further enhance the ORs' cultural wealth and promote exchanges with culture professionals in the ORs, especially by launching new pilot projects along the lines of Archipel.eu; calls for additional specific instruments, adapted to the characteristics of the cultural sector in the ORs, to support and promote the ORs' artists and tangible and intangible cultural heritage and protect regional languages;

Action on climate, biodiversity, energy independence and renewable energies

103. Stresses that, regarding biodiversity, targeted regional policies and action aimed at protecting the ORs' ecosystems and restoring their unique and exceptionally rich biodiversity are necessary to preserve their natural resources and means of subsistence; reiterates the need to continue and improve biodiversity protection and restoration measures; calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that the specific situation of the ORs is taken into account in the regulation on nature restoration and that the national plans are drawn up in conjunction with the authorities of the ORs and are designed with an appropriate balance between the economic, social and environmental dimensions; recalls the importance of developing a local waste management strategy that takes account of the ecological and energy transitions and the protection of biodiversity and contributes to the reinforcement of the circular economy in the ORs;

104. Reiterates the need for the specific characteristics of the ORs to be taken into account in regulations in order to strike a fair balance between the environmental imperative, accessibility needs and the high social and economic costs borne by their populations; regrets the fact that the specificities of the ORs have been taken into account only to a limited degree in the 'Fit for 55' package proposed by the Commission; calls on the Commission, therefore, to better reflect their specificities in future climate and energy packages;

105. Highlights the fact that the Member States and the European Parliament should continue to have an active and reactive role to ensure the protection of the ORs and reflect their particularities;

106. Urges the Commission and the Member States to support, in the context of the ongoing interinstitutional negotiations, Parliament's proposals for the specific characteristics of the ORs to be better taken into account in the texts of the 'Fit for 55' package; calls for an evaluation on the impact of the implementation of this legislative package on the ORs and, consequently, for it to be adapted to the reality of these regions; calls on the Commission and the Member States to support the ORs without delay in the carbon-neutral transition, including by way of new dedicated budget allocations; stresses the importance of taking the ORs' vulnerable situation into account specifically in the Social Climate Fund, the Modernisation Fund, the Innovation Fund, the Ocean Fund and the Climate Investment Fund, but also in other funding instruments that may be created, ensuring that citizens, families and businesses in these regions have access to these funds and support for small-scale projects;

107. Highlights the need to ensure territorial cohesion and the principle of territorial continuity, which will enable social cohesion; stresses that the EU's environmental objectives and targets always need to take into account the remoteness, isolation and/or insularity of the ORs, particularly with regard to the needs on transport to and from each OR; underlines that a derogation for the ORs so that the maritime transport can be excluded from the ETS system is fundamental; regrets the outcome of the interinstitutional agreement achieved for the ORs in the context of the revision of ETS aviation, which only covers flights between the ORs and their Member States temporarily until 2030; calls, therefore, on the Commission to present, before the end of the agreed temporary derogation, a detailed analysis on the impact of not excluding OR flights from the ETS; considers the development of a EU strategy regarding mobility and transport in the ORs to be of utmost importance, taking into account the specificities of each OR;

108. Insists that the opportunities for carbon retention offered by the ORs be considered, particularly blue carbon related to marine and coastal biodiversity and green carbon from forest carbon capture;

109. Underlines the ORs' vulnerability to climate change and geological effects, in particular to extreme weather and seismic events; regrets the fact that the Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve's annual ceiling is not sufficient to respond to emergencies, in particular in the ORs, which reduces EU support to far below the potential aid amount that would be needed; defends the position, therefore, that the EU Solidarity Fund should be revised to enable it to respond adequately,

and in a speedier, more flexible and more agile manner, even to smaller-scale disasters, including in the ORs, and to include the costs associated with prevention, regulatory compliance, evacuation and the disruption of local economies in disasters such as floods, cyclones, forest fires or extended seismic or volcanic activity; calls, furthermore, on the Commission to do its utmost to quickly deploy funds in order to cope with the effects of natural disasters;

110. Suggests that the Commission launches a study regarding the possible creation of an EU climate change adaptation fund in the next programming period, without prejudice to cohesion policy architecture or funding, in order to help the European regions, including the ORs, to adapt their infrastructure and implement preventive actions to improve their resilience to climate shocks;

111. Points out that almost all the ORs are composed of volcanic islands or archipelagos; calls on the Commission to set up, based on the European Network of Observatories and Research Infrastructures for Volcanology (EUROVOLC), a major EU programme focusing on the potential of volcanic regions, as well as a European research centre that could be based in an outermost region;

112. Reiterates the potential of the ORs for the development of innovative pilot projects on renewable energies, while ensuring that they will fully benefit from the resulting policies; reiterates, further, the need for stronger support such as coordinated investment; calls on the Commission to build on the ORs' potential and support renewable energies, including in French Guiana, under the conditions agreed by Parliament in its mandate for the interinstitutional negotiations on the revision of the Renewable Energy Directive (RED III); stresses the need to support these regions in the transition to carbon-free energy autonomy tailored to local realities; highlights, in this regard, the enormous potential of the ORs for the EU's energy autonomy and compliance with the 2050 climate neutrality objective;

113. Stresses the importance of cooperation for the development of renewable energy and welcomes the cooperation agreement on innovation, development and renewable energy between the Azores and the Canary Islands;

114. Warns of the increased risk of energy poverty in the ORs as a result of the higher cost of living and higher energy prices; reiterates that the ORs face very specific constraints resulting from their isolated electricity production systems, with no possibility of connection with other regions; advocates, therefore, the adoption of specific measures to prevent and tackle this situation by ensuring access to essential energy services; calls for the Modernisation Fund to be applied to the ORs in order to address the energy poverty endured by these extremely vulnerable regions;

115. Calls on the Commission to launch, by way of the Horizon 2020 programme and ERDF funds, a major programme for all the ORs and all European islands designed to develop green hydrogen;

116. Stresses the importance of the recovery and resilience plans in delivering a set of investments for renewable energy generation, thereby reducing the environmental footprint and greenhouse gas emissions;

The digital transition

117. Calls on the Commission to guarantee its support to Member States in order to ensure the swift use of all opportunities to fund digital infrastructure and connectivity; underlines that some of the submarine cables connecting the ORs are in need of urgent replacement and that that work should help to stimulate the local digital economy sector; calls on the Member States to use funding from the CEF for these projects;

118. Calls on the Commission to promote the expansion of the fibre optic network and the modernisation of the entire mobile network across all of the ORs, even in the most remote zones;

119. Calls on the Commission to create a regular European forum on digital and inclusive education, involving the participation of the ORs' authorities and ensuring the promotion of education in the digital field across all age groups, particularly focusing on underrepresented groups in the digital and AI sector; calls for targets to be set and the efficacy of digital skills programmes to be monitored in order to ensure that funding is used efficiently;

The ORs in a European Union for health

120. Points out the fragility of the ORs' health systems, which are characterised in some cases by a lack of infrastructure and health professionals; notes that this fragility has worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic;

121. Calls for the situation of the ORs and the state of their health systems to be taken into consideration, in particular in the improved and more effective health coordination that the EU seeks to pursue following the pandemic;

122. Calls on the Commission to support the Member States and regional and local authorities in designing and funding plans to attract and retain health professionals, particularly young medical doctors, in order to reduce disparities in health services;

123. Points out that there are still significant inequalities in the health sector in the EU, particularly in the ORs, including in preventing and combating cancer; argues that it is precisely the vulnerability of the sector in these regions that reinforces the need to focus on prevention and early detection; stresses, therefore, the need to pay special attention to the inhabitants of the ORs in order to ensure that they have proper access to cancer prevention and combating services by encouraging and supporting the creation of public policies as part of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan;

124. Reiterates the importance of the EU4Health programme in reducing inequalities in healthcare services; stresses that national focal points should proactively organise information sessions in all of the ORs to increase awareness of the programme;

125. Regrets the fact that the Commission has not yet involved the ORs' authorities in the definition of the annual EU4Health work programmes and expects the Commission to do so without further delay and to involve the ORs in discussions about policy initiatives of specific interest, such as those on vaccination, cancer, mental health, climate change and long-term care;

126. Asks the Commission to encourage the Member States and the ORs concerned to support health system development and access to care (including health promotion, preventive care and long-term care) and develop and adopt or introduce e-health solutions to help address shortages in health professionals and health system digitalisation, while investing in digital skills, competences and literacy, in particular of the most vulnerable population groups and health professionals; asks the Commission, further, to encourage the Member States and the ORs concerned to participate in actions under the EU4Health programme (including the joint actions), in particular on bridging health inequalities, crisis preparedness and response, including the climate change emergency, e-health, health promotion and disease prevention, and access to healthcare, including mental health care, long-term care and tropical disease treatment;

127. Encourages the ORs' participation in actions under the Horizon Europe programme, as well as cooperation with the Commission's Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority, in order to secure the provision of critical medical supplies and to have in place the health workforce required during a crisis, and with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control on preparedness and response to health threats, including those related to mental health and the climate change emergency;

128. Proposes the creation of a research centre for tropical infectious diseases and medical conditions that are particularly common in the ORs, such as diabetes, obesity and certain cancers;

The importance of the ORs in the space race and European scientific development

129. Underlines the privileged location and available infrastructures in some of the ORs for space activities, in particular for ensuring that the Union has autonomous access to space; regrets the lack of specific commitments by the Commission in this area; calls on the Commission to better support national plans to relaunch space activities, which are a major source of innovation and European sovereignty;

130. Calls for coordination between EU funds dedicated to EU space policy and regional development, aimed at increasing the local contribution to and the local return on the space ecosystems that are being developed around the infrastructures in French Guiana and the Azores; underlines the need to ensure skilling and upskilling opportunities for the people living in the regions where the space infrastructure ground segments are located and to improve their living conditions;

131. Calls for enhanced environmental impact assessments of the space-related activities taking place in the ORs and for the development of appropriate sustainability measures that will ensure, to the greatest possible extent, the prevention of negative impacts and compensation where prevention is not possible;

132. Underlines the importance of having updated and tailored smart specialisation strategies to boost research and innovation in the ORs;

133. Welcomes the greater adaptation of Horizon Europe work programmes to the ORs in order to encourage local research and innovation communities;

134. Reiterates the importance of the participation of higher education institutions and marine research centres, as well as the involvement of maritime schools, in the ORs and their business fabric in European and international research networks, given their knowledge of the unique dynamics and characteristics of these regions, with a view to strengthening their innovation systems and creating more 'blue jobs';

Better use of European funds, partnerships and trade agreements

135. Recognises the relevance of the RRF and the (REACT-EU programme for effective recovery in the ORs; points out, however, the importance of reconsidering the execution deadlines of the RRF to boost economic recovery in the ORs, taking into account the current context of war, inflation and labour and raw material shortages in fundamental sectors, which makes it difficult to carry out structural projects for these regions; calls on the Commission, therefore, to anticipate future crises in the ORs by promoting instruments that offset the effects of crises on the populations of these regions and to ensure that the objectives of national recovery and resilience plans are achieved and that a detailed report with final allocations is submitted to Parliament;

136. Underlines the key role of cohesion policy in unlocking the ORs' potential, in offsetting the impact of their permanent constraints and in reducing economic and social gaps between these regions and the rest of the EU; stresses the need to better account for the ORs' specific features in cohesion fund programming, while ensuring that they can fully benefit from provisions enabling greater flexibility, namely higher co-financing rates and access to pre-financing; underlines that the Member States and the ORs are responsible for shaping and implementing their respective development strategies and priorities and for making full use of the potential of EU funds;

137. Regrets that the already small number of programmes, public policies and funds specific to the outermost regions have been disappearing in favour of their integration in horizontal European programmes, thus diluting the tailor-made approach needed for ORs;

138. Calls on the Commission to provide support for continuing the work begun under the flagship FORWARD project, so that the efforts made and the results already achieved in the nine outermost regions are not lost;

139. Welcomes the Commission's announcement of the creation of a portal on all available EU funds, programmes and policy initiatives for the ORs, which responds to a request made by Parliament in its resolution of 14 September 2021 on a new approach to the Atlantic maritime strategy; urges the Commission to create this portal without delay and to continue offering support, where appropriate, to ensure better knowledge and use of funds by the Member States and regional authorities; calls on the Commission to raise awareness about the ORs' specificities in all its directorates-general, to reduce administrative burdens and to assist these regions with their procedures in order to provide them with easier access to EU funds and programmes; calls on the European institutions to increase their presence on the ground by setting up physical offices in the ORs; calls on the ORs to make use of all EU funds and programmes available to them; proposes the establishment of a European Year of the Outermost Regions;

140. Calls on the Commission and national and regional authorities to strike a balance between essential controls on the use of EU funds and the simpler, more flexible administrative rules needed to optimise them in order to encourage local initiatives, particularly in the ORs;

141. Stresses that the European Union's trade policy has a major economic impact in the ORs; underlines the need to protect the ORs' interests in the international agreements (free trade agreements, economic partnership agreements and official development assistance) concluded by the European Union; expresses its strong concern about imports of products from non-EU countries that do not comply with EU social, labour, environmental, food safety, quality and animal welfare standards, including standards for organic-labelled products; recalls that many of these imported goods directly compete with the export production of the ORs in the whole of the EU market or even with local production in its own regional market;

142. Calls on the Commission to grant preferential treatment to products from the ORs, both in their local markets and the EU market, to fully protect sensitive agricultural products, such as bananas, tomatoes, sugar and milk, in the negotiations of free trade and economic partnership agreements, and to ensure the conformity of non-EU country imports with EU standards; urges the Commission to implement procedures to take account of sensitive products from the ORs and to envisage, if necessary, transitional periods, appropriate import quotas and customs tariffs, safeguard clauses and surveillance and sanction mechanisms; calls on the Commission, furthermore, to systematically carry out regional impact assessments in these regions, in partnership with regional and local authorities and other interested stakeholders, before concluding agreements, and to include mirror and suspension clauses in the agreements; points out that current trade agreements with non-EU countries should be revised to incorporate these clauses;

143. Calls for the creation of a trade agreements task force within the Commission involving representatives from the Member States concerned and the ORs' economic sectors, including farming representatives and other relevant stakeholders, to analyse, among other concerns, the difficulties faced by these regions as a result of increasing external competition, including from non-EU-country products labelled as organic; calls, furthermore, on the Commission to prepare a report on the cumulative effect of free trade agreements on the farming sector in the ORs;

144. Welcomes the fact that the Commission recognises the ORs as a unique asset for the EU's external relations;

145. Emphasises that the ORs represent European Union outposts and enhance the Union's outreach into neighbouring countries in their regional areas; calls on the Commission and the Member States to work with the ORs' local and regional authorities to implement development strategies that include enhanced regional integration and cooperation; calls, in particular, on the Commission and local and regional authorities to promote synergies between actions supported by the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)-Global Europe and Interreg funds intended for the ORs;

146. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure greater synergies and coordinated management of European funds, particularly the ERDF, Global Europe and the Council Decision on the association of the Overseas Countries and Territories with the European Union⁽³⁷⁾, in order to achieve, especially for the ORs, greater and more effective territorial cooperation and better financing, especially for their businesses and citizens;

147. Underlines the importance of student exchange programmes, within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, in training young professionals from the participating countries; advocates setting up an exchange programme for students from the ORs with countries and regions neighbouring these regions, along the same lines;

⁽³⁷⁾ Council Decision (EU) 2021/1764 of 5 October 2021 on the association of the Overseas Countries and Territories with the European Union including relations between the European Union on the one hand, and Greenland and the Kingdom of Denmark on the other (Decision on the Overseas Association, including Greenland) (OJ L 355, 7.10.2021, p. 6).

148. Recalls that cooperation between the ORs and neighbouring countries or territories must be improved in the light of current realities, and that action must therefore be taken with regard to the regulatory, administrative, budgetary and political rules and regulations governing this cooperation;

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149. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.
