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Regione Siciliana

Political Bureau of the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR)

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ISLAND REGIONS, ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION AND THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE

by

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Distinguished colleagues of CPMR,

President Loggen, General Secretary Marianou, and Vice President Sjölund.

1. I am honoured to participate in the CPMR Political Bureau as a representative of the Sicilian Region and the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission Presidency, bringing President Musumeci's greetings. Sicily is an active part of the CPMR (*Regions acting for climate neutrality initiative*) "*Regions Act!*" and today's round table allows us to deepen many aspects of important issues.

As pointed out by the CPMR Vice-President for Climate and Energy, Richard Sjölund, if no region is to be left behind, the ecological transition must take place within an equitable framework. This is particularly relevant for the island regions, which must be given the opportunity to unleash their enormous potential for innovation and position themselves as a reference in the energy transition of their area. The ecological transition is an issue of absolute relevance for Mediterranean territories that are at the forefront in dealing with the effects of climate change, whether in terms of coastal management, water resources, construction of infrastructure for marine renewable energy, food sovereignty, but also tourist or trade flows, to name but a few examples.

2. A territorial approach can significantly contribute to a sustainable green and digital transition and requires more frequent territorial impact assessments to be conducted as part of cohesion policy objectives and those of the European *Green Deal* and Digital Strategy.

For environmental policies, too, partnership is a collective process involving public authorities at European, national, regional and local levels, as well as their socio-economic partners and representatives of civil society. The application of the principles of *partnership* and *multi-level governance*, in fact, helps to identify in more appropriate terms the objectives to be achieved, to create a stronger commitment to address the needs, as well as to create a perception of "*ownership*" among the partners involved and to ensure better complementarity with other tools; it also helps to strengthen the adherence to the common European project



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by communicating how cohesion policy helps to solve local problems, thus bringing the EU closer to citizens and reducing the democratic deficit.

It is clear that only an in-depth analysis of local and regional characteristics and needs can provide the basis for appropriate program definition. In addition, institutional cooperation helps to improve synergies between adopted policies and avoid duplication or conflicting approaches.

The principles of partnership must also be fully implemented in the context of new tools, such as the Just Transition Mechanism, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and other new ones funded under *Next Generation EU* for Recovery and Resilience that will have a prominent focus on cohesion policy.

In this regard, it should be recalled what is stated in the *European Code of Conduct on Partnership within the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds for the 2014-2020 programming period*, which introduces the partnership principle and contains detailed recommendations for the implementation of partnership, but also takes into account the specific needs at local and regional level¹.

The full involvement of regions, cities and municipalities in the development of partnership agreements and operational programs is a fundamental condition for these to be outlined in a strategic manner to reflect the needs of the territories, and leads to the conclusion that effective implementation of partnership and multi-level governance is essential to better identify the investment priorities to be supported through the SIE funds.

The pandemic has resulted in the emergence of centralizing tendencies in the programming and implementation of EIS funds² with negative repercussions on the parallel running of two programming periods, delaying the drafting of partnership agreements and operational programs, which were not completed in time for the starting of the new programming period.

It is therefore necessary to accelerate the groundwork and intensify the discussions, reversing the trend and relaunching the principle of partnership, including through the use of digital media.

¹ In particular, it should be noted that art. 6 of the Commission delegated regulation provides for the balanced involvement of partners in the preparation of partnership agreements and operational programs, as well as compliance with the European code of conduct; therefore calls on managing authorities and central coordination bodies to fully comply with these requirements and to involve partners beyond mere formal consultations.

² Lastly, see the position of CPMR, CPMR analysis on the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, in <https://cpmr.org/wpdm-package/cpmr-analysis-on-the-national-recovery-and-resilience-plans> and the interesting study prepared for the European Committee of the Regions, Regional and local authorities and the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, at <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents>.



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3. Sicily and its minor islands are facing multiple challenges, one of which concerns transition and energy infrastructure. To respond to these challenges, the Sicilian regional government is implementing targeted strategies, based on its territorial specificities, involving the territories starting from the smaller islands.

Among all of them, it is worth mentioning the *Environmental Energy Plan of the Region* (PEARS 2019-2030), which is currently being approved. A plan that takes into account the costs of climate neutrality, especially in territories that are highly dependent on fossil fuels, imposing a fair transition, with particular attention to social consequences and effects on the labor market. The increase in renewable energies, in fact, translates into positive economic effects on the territory in the form of a renewed labor market and lower energy costs.

Another example that I would like to share with you is related to the "*Green Island*" project, a plan aimed at increasing the potential for electricity generation in the smaller Sicilian islands, first of all Pantelleria. Since most of the minor Sicilian islands at the moment can not reach full energy autonomy through renewable sources, this project aims to create the conditions for economic development by encouraging the connection to the national grid.

In this regard, the tourism and transportation sectors will play a key role towards the desired green transition as the daily demand for electricity increases during the summer months due to the influx of tourists.

The project demonstrates an all-encompassing approach that combines several key economic sectors and simultaneously aims at economic development and an energy transition towards an increasingly sustainable and connected electricity system. The peculiarity of the "*Green Island*" project lies in a differentiated approach for each minor island, which is adapted to the territorial characteristics: a fundamental element to ensure that the different territorial realities can benefit from the energy transition, being in turn an integral part of it.

A further ambitious goal that the Sicilian Region can boast is inherent to the establishment of a full-scale "*Hydrogen Valley*" in order to promote the development of projects aimed at the production of green hydrogen. The *Hydrogen Valley* is not only an unmissable opportunity for innovation and energy transition but also a great opportunity in terms of employment for the younger generations.

In this sense, the so-called *Just Transition* must ensure that the more vulnerable territories and those facing greater challenges in the transition, such as islands, can benefit from an adequate support.



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Sicilian Region's best practices, which I have briefly recalled here, are a tangible demonstration that the Mediterranean islands have the potential to become real laboratories of innovation, also favouring social and territorial cohesion, in large urban centers as well as in smaller islands.

In conclusion, it can therefore be said that the involvement of peripheral and maritime regions is crucial for the achievement of European climate objectives. In addition, one must not forget the importance of working in synergy with the territories and islands of the Mediterranean basin. This becomes the only way to achieve the objectives of the *European Green Deal* in a coherent way and in response to the challenges of each of our territories. We have a significant potential that needs recognition and support so that the energy transition can take place throughout Europe and create a sustainable future for all.

Thank you for your kind attention