



INSULEUR Workshop

Building an Evidence-based knowledge for European Islands as a condition for a European Policy for Islands

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Today we are discussing an important topic for INSULEUR 'Building an Evidence-based knowledge for European islands as a condition for European Policy for Islands.' I would like to thank first of all the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), and the other organisations who are cooperating with us today: the European Small Islands Network and the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions. I would also like to thank the panelists and speakers who will be providing their contribution

Yesterday I had the opportunity to participate in a public debate organised by the EESC. In this debate which discussed 'Insularity and socio-economic development: The role of civil society in addressing the challenges that islands are facing' I presented INSULEUR's reaction to a Preliminary Draft Opinion on the 'Main challenges faced by EU islands, and monountainous and sparsely populated areas.' I would like to thank first of all Joannis Vardakastanis for this important initiative.

One of the proposals with which we at INSULEUR are in agreement is, that the GDP criterion should not be the only one to determine the degree of development on islands. However, there needs to be data which would lead to the formulation of other indicators. It is only then that we can develop an evidence-based policy approach which can really help in targeting the challenges faced by islands.

Yesterday we discussed the status of islands. Unfortunately a clause introduced in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, while recognising the difficulties faced by islands and gives ample powers to address them, is not being used by the European Commission to address such issues. We need the status of islands to be recognised at all levels. But we also need proper legislative and policy measures to be in place which can help address the challenges related to insularity.

However, there is an intermediary step which we are still missing. This is the need of data. We all agreed that islands suffered significantly during COVID-19 pandemic, because of their significant dependency on tourism. Nonetheless, it was left to the Member States to address the difficulties faced in their respective islands during the pandemic. While we were able to argue our case, we did not have the data at hand to formalise what all of us were seeing happening on the ground. Having data indicators for islands would enable us to create policy proposals and initiatives which are evidence based, and which are more likely to be accepted at an EU level.

The proposals that were put forward in the background document to this workshop are a very good basis for the discussion we are having today which should concentrate both on the type of indicators needed for islands, but also on how this should be done. In the background document INSULEUR proposed the creation of an Observatory for island economies, which would help all the stakeholders make informed policy decisions. This does not only apply to the public sector but also to the private sector.

I am sure that today's fruitful discussion with members of the most important EU institutions, and from organisations such as INSULEUR, the Conference of the Peripheral Maritime Regions, and the European Small Islands Network, will continue to fuel this healthy debate, which should lead us to find practical solutions which can be implemented for our islands.