



## **INSULEUR Forum**

### **Impacts of Climate Change on the Economies of European Islands**

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Dear Ministers, distinguished guests, colleagues, and all the representatives of the Chambers of islands, thank you for being with us today. A special word of thanks goes to the General Secretariat of the Aegean and Island Policy, and the Union of Hellenic Chambers of Commerce for their support. There can be no change without unity! And the fact that we are here today is a testimony to this.

Today we are discussing the impacts of climate change on the Economies of European Islands. Reduced rainfall, droughts, torrential rain, increase in temperatures, and wild fires are all aspects of climate change that we are witnessing today. But why are islands different?

Each island is different, each with its own risks. Given their limited natural resources and their geographical boundaries, climate change, will and is presently having significant impact on many levels. These include the islands' water supply, and consequently the need for water treatment; energy supply, distribution and demand; transport, and the built environment. Considering also the reliance on tourism, it is important to note that most of the economic and social activity on islands is centred around the coastline. Given that coastlines are the most impacted by climate change, and the rise in sea level, the risks to the islands' infrastructure is significant! We need to act now!

Like most of us present here today, I come from, work and live on an island. So, I can speak from my experience. The recently published Gozo Regional Development Strategy for example given Gozo's context highlights important actions that need to be taken. The strategy in fact:

outlines several pivotal objectives, including establishing a network of accessible open spaces in both urban and rural areas, fostering biodiversity, encouraging sustainable construction methods, and mitigating the effects of climate change. The strategy also outlines a series of initiatives to realize these objectives. These initiatives encompass expanding green areas, promoting eco-friendly building practices, reevaluating current transportation modes, optimizing water resource management, rehabilitating valleys, restoring wells, supporting water distribution systems for Gozitan farmers, and extending afforestation initiatives.<sup>1</sup>

However there is an extra step. We cannot do this alone! Our islands need help in order to achieve this transition. During the COVID-19 pandemic as INSULEUR we had spoken forcefully, and voiced our concerns at an EU level on ensuring an adequate recovery for islands.<sup>2</sup> In fact in my letter in June 2020 to the Head of the European Commission, European Parliament and Council we had highlighted “the need for the implementation of a specific strategy for EU islands with an appropriate policy/legislative framework that encompasses a much needed territorial dimension at all levels: European, national, and regional / local.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Attard, J. and Cassar, M. 2023. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation. A regional analysis of the island of Gozo. *Perspettivi. A Gozo Review* 3, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> INSULEUR. 2020. *Ensuring an adequate recovery in islands*. [Press Release],[Accessed 28 November 2023]. Available from: [https://gozobusinesschamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/INSULEUR\\_Press-release\\_23-06-2020.pdf](https://gozobusinesschamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/INSULEUR_Press-release_23-06-2020.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Borg, J. 2020. *Letter to Ursula Von Der Leyen, David Maria Sassoli, and Charles Michel*, 18 June.

We are not alone in this plight. In June of 2022 a resolution on EU islands was adopted, recognizing the need for a true cohesion policy helping European islands to overcome the specific challenges and disparities they face.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the fact that it recognises the fact that a strategy for islands with tangible proposals needs to be considered, the important milestone of this resolution is that it establishes a renewed consciousness about the particular situation of islands.

However, it is important that we do not remain simply in the realm of words. While we need to do all we can to reduce the impact of climate change, we cannot do so in such a manner as to impact islands negatively, especially in the areas of transportation. Thus while the Fit for 55 package and the Green Deal, are important steps in the right direction, we cannot take actions that for example make transportation to and from islands more expensive considering that the transport alternatives to reach islands are very limited. We need to invest in such a manner as to hasten the shift towards more sustainable forms of transport but without in the meantime impacting heavily on the economies of our islands.

Let us move together sustainably, let us see to the needs of islands, let us also ensure that their ecosystems are protected, and their beauty is not in any way jeopardised. However, let us also see that islands are not in any way penalised in their efforts! A balanced and considerate approach is therefore necessary.

I want to conclude with this remark. On the 11 June of 2021, two years ago that is, I was invited in Pireus as president of Insuleur to address the opening session of a conference on the contribution of the Greek insular economy on the occasion of the 200 years of Greek independence. In that address I stated

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<sup>4</sup> *European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2022 on EU islands and cohesion policy: current situation and future challenges (2021/2079(INI))*. [Online]. [Accessed 28 November 2023]. Available from: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0225\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0225_EN.pdf)

that Greece would not be Greece without its islands. Today I want to repeat this message and extend it by stating that Europe would not be Europe without its islands. We all know this but our Europe must also realise this fact and as consequence draw up an Island pact as soon as possible and see to it that it is implemented including amongst others the problematics related to the adverse impact of climate change on islands. With all this in mind, I conclude by wishing you all a good conference today. Thank you!

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