



CRPM CPMR

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### ISLANDS ARE ASKING COMMISSIONER ALMUNIA FOR MORE FLEXIBILITY

With the preparation of the future guidelines on regional State aid under way, a delegation of the Islands Commission of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), headed by its President **Ugo Cappellacci**, President of Sardinia Region (IT), met today with Competition Commissioner, **Joaquín Almunia**, to ask for more flexibility in the State aid system.

*"The island regions are asking for their specific situation to be taken into consideration and for the provisions in Article 174 of the [Treaty](#) on economic, social and territorial cohesion to be implemented in practice,"* was the message addressed by Ugo Cappellacci, President of Sardinia (IT) to the Commissioner in charge of Competition. The Sardinian leader recalled that *"the size of the local market in island regions is smaller than that of mainland regions, and their territory does not allow for economies of scale and also lacks natural resources."*

One of the proposals put forward by the Islands Commission was an increase in the *de minimis* ceiling for small amounts of State aid not considered to affect the market.

On this issue, **Joaquín Almunia** said that he was *"open to changing this ceiling"* acknowledging that small amounts of State aid do not cause any significant distortion to the market.

The CPMR also raised the question of the provisions laid down in Article 107-3c of the [Treaty](#) which it feels ought to be applied to all islands, as well as the possibility of granting operating aid to cover extra transport costs incurred by island businesses. Regarding these aspects, the Spanish Commissioner considered that a number of problems were posed, but nevertheless indicated that the European Commission's services were prepared to look into the situation of European islands on a case by case basis and assess the overall impact of these measures.

During the discussions, **Jean Didier Hache**, Executive Secretary of the CPMR Islands Commission, drew the Commissioner's attention to the fact that there is often little or no understanding of competition and State aid rules within the island Regions and that *"a pedagogic effort needs to be made"*. The CPMR believes this should be the responsibility of the DGs concerned within the European Commission, working closely with island authorities. On this issue, the Commissioner acknowledged that there was a lack of understanding of the rules and agreed with the proposal. *"The complexity of State aid rules might well be understood by big businesses or multinationals who can rely on specialist consultancy firms, but it is quite another story for island businesses which are often very small,"* affirmed the Executive Secretary of the Islands Commission, Mr Hache.

**Esteban Mas Portell**, Delegate of Balearic Islands Government (ES) and Member of the Committee of the Regions, also attended as part of the delegation and presented a concrete example of his archipelago where *"the high level of GDP does not prevent us from experiencing serious difficulties in economic development"*.

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