

Address at Umeå event on 4 May 2023

Good morning/ good afternoon

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate in this discussion and share my experiences on islands, and Gotland in particular, with you.

Europe has a multitude of islands with more than 20 million islanders throughout the EU.

The variation between the islands differs a lot with regards to size, distance and population among other things.

Why then talk about islands if they vary so much?

It is important to talk about islands because they share permanent geographical handicaps.

Such as

- 1) **territorial discontinuity with reference to mainland Europe,**
- 2) **the territories' limited size**
- 3) **limited natural resources and sensitive ecosystems**
- 4) **distance to the continent and/or main political, economic and social hubs**
- 5) **socio-economic and cultural sensitivity** in the event of external shocks resulting from dependence on a few industries.

Towards a Pact for Islands

These are some of the reasons why Gotland together with other island regions in the CPMR Islands Commission incessantly urges EU institutions to adopt a forward-looking, holistic and place-based approach to the structural geographical specificities.

Current and recent crises exacerbated the need for such an approach.

Let me remind you of the articles 174 and 175 in the TFEU.

In brief, the picture of a full impact/application of Articles 174 and 175 in EU legislation and policy development shows that most of the work remains to be done.

A Pact for Islands, an Islands Agenda, now what is that?

The short version: Regardless of the issue at hand, there must be a territorial impact analysis based on insular perspective and related territorial proofing in the EU legislative processes.

It is not about demands for more financial transfers, but about a method. This is a key message!

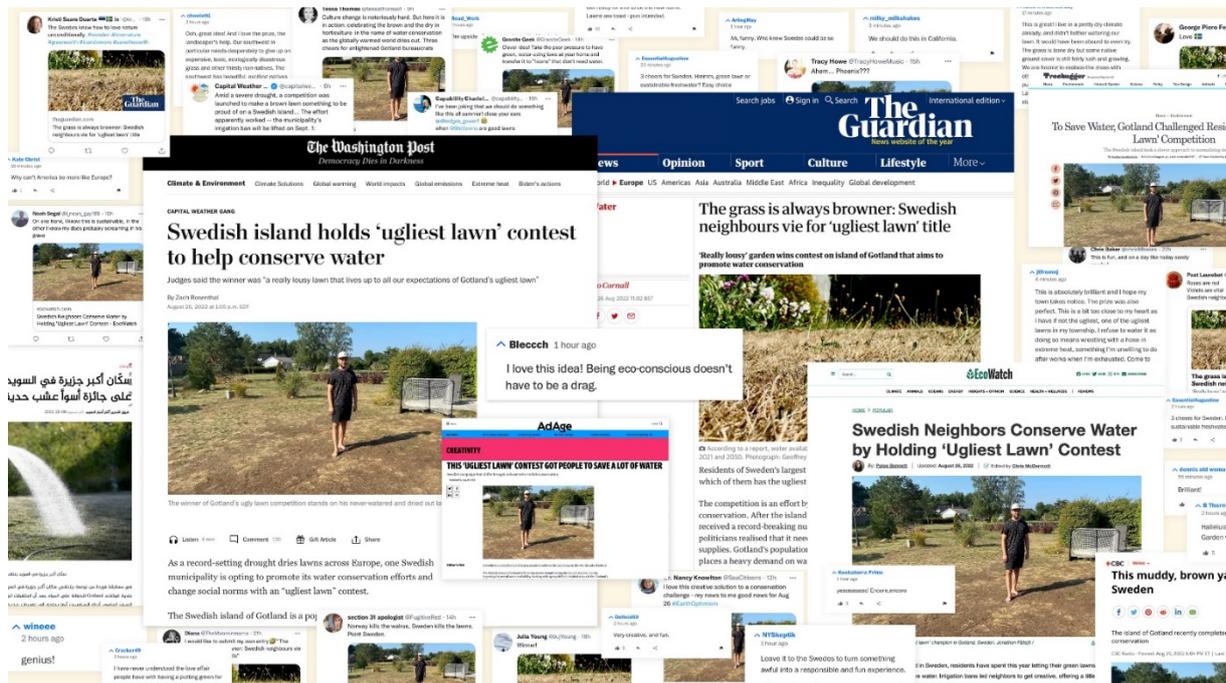
This is also the message laid out in the Gotland Declaration that was adopted by the CPMR IC on Gotland in May 2022 and in the Final Declaration on Mallorca in February 2023. A number of key EU actors, among others from the European Parliament (e.g., INI Report on Cohesion & Islands by Omarjee), support these messages.

About Gotland – challenges and the twin transition of energy and digitalisation

My own island, Gotland, in the middle of the Baltic Sea, sometimes appears in international articles on the current geopolitical situation and the militarisation, as this article from 1 July 2022 in the Financial Times.



At the other end of the spectrum, Gotland also receives praise for its innovation. This is an example about how to make residents save water, which is a scarce resource on Gotland as on many islands.



Gotland has a number of important assets and enablers, let me just mention the status that relates to today's topic:

1. **Quality infrastructure:** ferry and flight connections, an expanded port for larger cruise ships, very good broadband connectivity (88% of households have access to fibre), advanced renewable energy systems (biogas, wind, solar).

On the other hand, some infrastructure will soon no longer be capable of providing appropriate level of service. Key investment needs in areas affecting the entire economy of Gotland are:

- Expanding the capacity for renewable energy;
- Upgrading wireless capacity to 5G

Other challenges are: water management, transport, and affordable housing.

The digitalisation and energy transition and islands

What is specific to Gotland is that we already have an excellent fibre connectivity, but we must capitalize on this asset and digitalise the economy to make it more productive.

Energy transition is on its way on Gotland. However, it will demand huge investments in energy efficiency, enhanced grid capacity including a new cable to the mainland, and the production of renewable electricity.

Islands can be test beds for energy transition. In fact, some islands in Europe have already made the energy transition a reality, but islands can also be hubs for innovative soft transition.

In terms of needs to release the contribution of islands

By way of example in relation to the green transition: While Gotland and the CPMR Island Commission are strongly in favour of and dedicated to the advancement of the Fit55, we are also concerned.

Why? The Fitfor55 is an example of a European initiative that is not fit for islands, since it does not take into account their specificities and the fact that decarbonisation will imply additional costs linked to their insularity (high dependence on air/maritime transport).

This is actually an excellent example why we need a specific framework for islands in place, which can ensure a tailored approach to these territories in all EU policies of major territorial impact.

This has not happened in the green transition so far.

To sum up, islands are Europe, for islanders and mainlanders alike.

Islands are the first regions to be affected by crises (climate, migrant, energy etc.)

Islands can be efficient testbeds for innovative solutions that also benefit mainland Europe.

So let us cooperate and move forward together for a green, smart and prosperous Europe!

Thank you for listening