

Contents

The GEOSPECS Interim Report has been accepted by ESPON

Delineations of GEOSPECS areas

Analytical framework: hypotheses on the social and economic relevance of GEOSPECS areas

Case study areas

Events

The GEOSPECS Interim Report has been accepted by ESPON

The [Interim Report](#) of the GEOSPECS project was accepted by ESPON. It contains information on the main results the project has achieved so far: This is primarily the construction of a framework of analysis, with coherent delineations of the objects of study and the formulation of hypotheses on how these may be socially and economically relevant.

Delineations of GEOSPECS areas

For the Interim Report, the Transnational Project Group (TPG) has identified areas with geographic specificities in Europe.

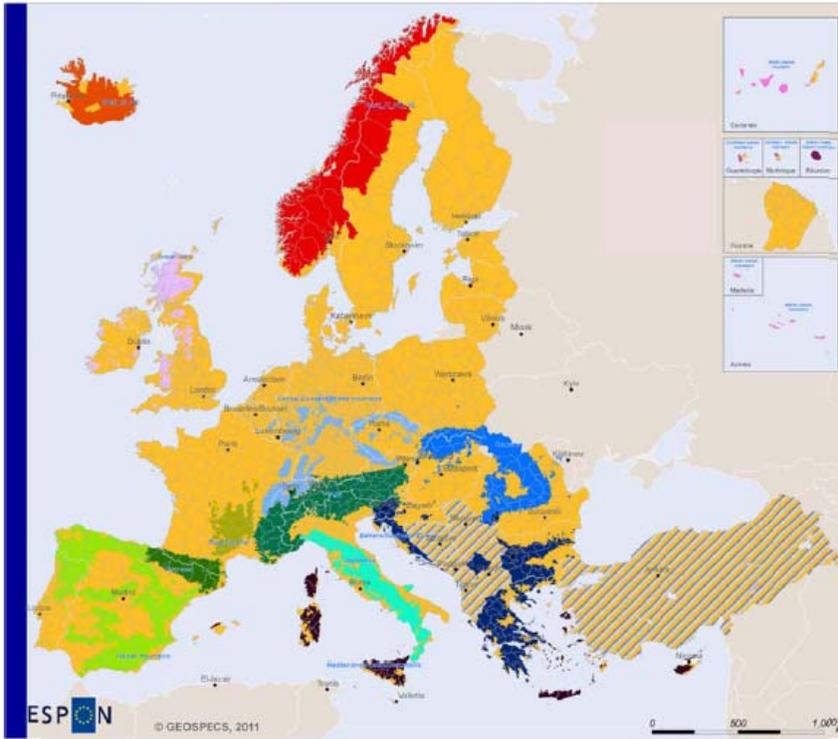
All delineations are based on so-called LAU 2 units, corresponding to municipalities in most countries. Different approaches have been chosen for each category of geographic specificity.



Photos: Paul Allison & Jürgen Howaldt

The two-year (2010-2012) ESPON Applied Research Project GEOSPECS (Geographic Specificities and Development Potentials in Europe) aims to provide a solid assessment of the current situation, trends and perspectives of areas with geographic specificities, i.e. mountains, islands, sparsely populated areas, coastal zones, outermost regions, border areas and inner peripheries.

Mountains:



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European Mountain massifs

- Balkans/Southeast Europe
- Carpathians
- Central European Middle mountains
- Apennines
- Massif central
- Iberian mountains
- Pyrenees
- Alps

- British Isles
- Scandinavian mountains

Insular mountain areas

- Icelandic mountains
- Mediterranean island mountains
- Indian Ocean island mountains
- Caribbean island mountains
- Atlantic island mountain

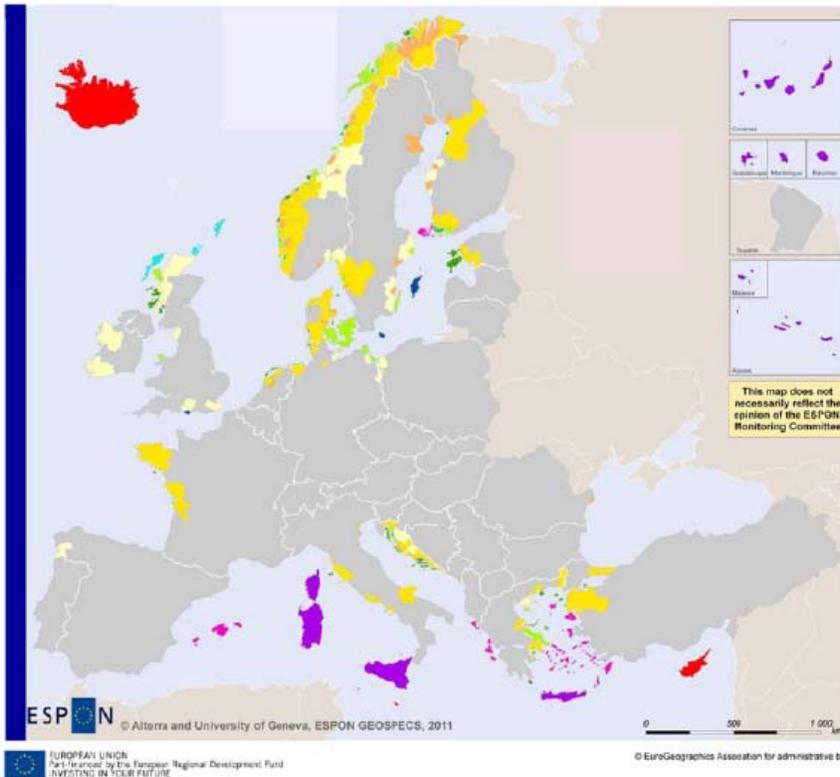
- No Mountain
- Data in progress

The mountain delineation builds on previous studies (Nordregio, 2004 and EEA, 2010). It is based on the GTOPO30 Digital Elevation Model, which records average elevation of the Earth's land surface in a 1km² grid. To define mountainousness, different thresholds of terrain roughness and slope are applied at different levels of altitude, up to 2500m, above which all areas are considered as mountains.

This set of grid cells with mountainous topography is approximated to municipal boundaries by considering that LAU 2 units with more than 50% mountainous terrain should be defined as mountainous. Mountain exclaves of less than 100 km² are excluded, whereas non-mountainous enclaves of less than 200 km² surrounded by mountains are included in the mountain delineation. The mountainous LAU 2 units were then grouped into 15 European massifs, i.e. transnational groups of mountain areas with some similarities.

Islands:

As a starting point, all territories that are physically disjoint from the European mainland are considered as insular, including parts of municipalities, but excluding inland islands. Excluded are also the British Isles and Ireland, due to their population size and to the fact that they have never laid claim to the status of “small island state”. On this basis, a typology of islands is established. Firstly, islands with a fixed connection to the mainland are considered as a separate category. Secondly, a multilevel approach is used (NUTS 1 to LAU 2), as the socio-economic impact and political significance of insularity is considered to be different depending on whether it occurs at the national, regional or local scale.



Island delineation

NUTS 0 level: Small island states

- Main island
- Secondary island municipalities: situations of double insularity

NUTS 1/2 level island regions

- Main island
- Secondary islands municipalities: situations of double insularity
- Archipelagos

NUTS 3 level island regions

- One main island
- Archipelagos

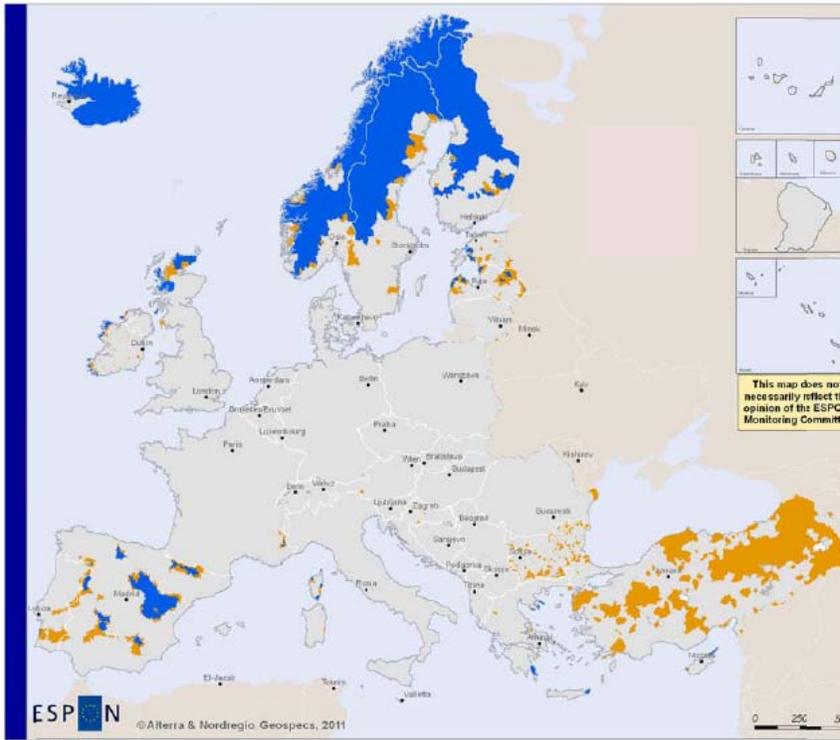
LAU 2 level: Island municipalities

- Entirely insular municipalities with a fixed link to the mainland (from one or more islands)
- Other entirely insular municipalities

Regions and municipalities with significant insular component

- NUTS 3 regions including island municipalities with a fixed link to the mainland
- NUTS 3 regions including other island municipalities
- Municipalities within significant insular component: > 8% of the municipal territory or total island area > 10km²

Sparsely Populated Areas (SPA):

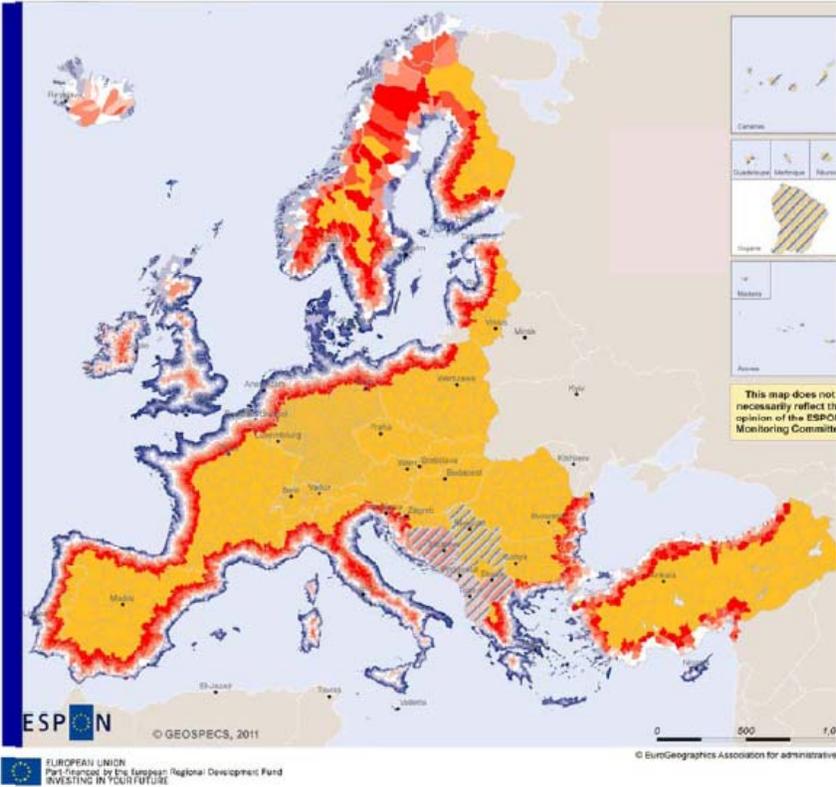


The delineation of SPA is not based on population density, because this measure is too dependent on the way in which administrative boundaries are drawn and the scale chosen. Instead, the TPG uses “population potential”, i.e. a total number of persons within a given distance or travel time. Areas are considered as sparsely populated if they have a population potential below 100,000 persons within a distance of 50 km or 45 minutes travel time. In a second step, localities (LAU 2 level) are defined as sparsely populated if 90% of their area is sparse. Lastly, the TPG does not delineate sparsely populated NUTS 3 regions, but considers that sparsity is a relevant territorial development issue for a NUTS 3 region if the region contains at least one sparsely populated LAU 2 unit.

Sparsely Populated and Poorly Connected LAU2 Units
 LAU2 regions with over 90% of area located beyond population potential 100 000 inhabitants

- Sparsely Populated (according to the 50km and 45 min delineations)
- Poorly Connected (according to the 45 min delineation only)

Coasts:



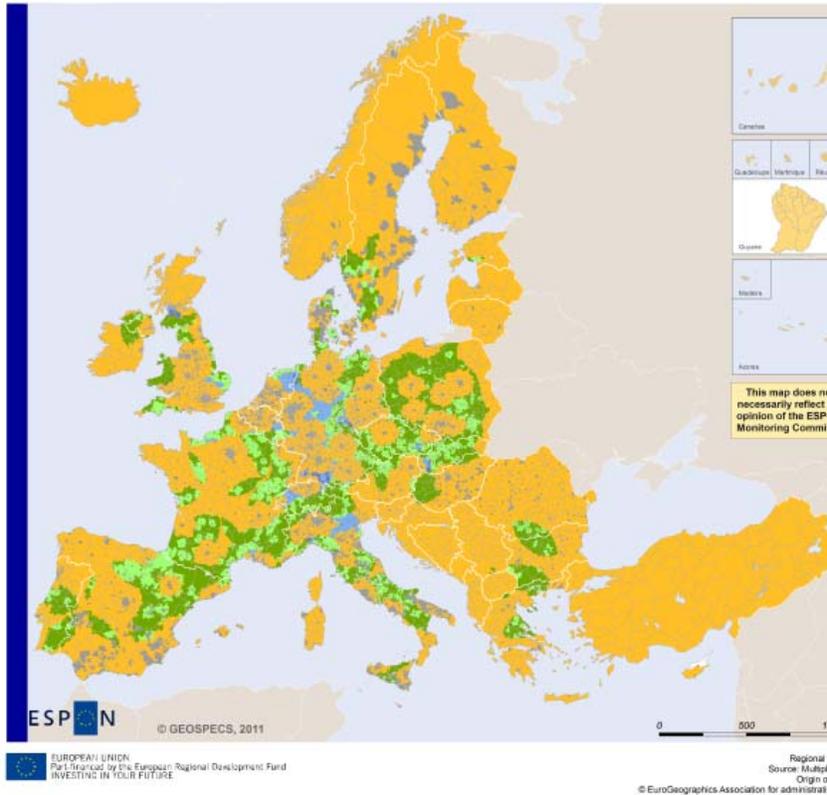
/// Data in progress

Traveltime to Coast from LAU2 units



The TPG does not consider it meaningful to produce a general delineation of coastal zones, insofar as specific ranges of mobility and interaction associated with each type of coastal effect differ. However, the only database with complete and adequate coverage of all European coastline regions is of NUTS 3 designations that touch the sea. Thus, a typology that draws on NUTS 3 delineations, but that is mapped using purposefully-defined delineations (such as a combination of time-distance relationships to the coast), land use and change, environmental risk, stakeholder perceptions and valuations, energy and urban focal points may be necessary.

Inner Peripheries (IP):



Inner peripheries

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Dark Blue | High population potential |
| Light Blue | High population potential, regional centre inside |
| Green | Low population potential |
| Light Green | Low population potential, regional centre inside |
| Grey | MUA's |

Delineating IP as regions within the core area of the EU is a new concept in the ESPON space. The first delineation of IP at the European scale prepared by the GEOSPECS TPG is based on the following criteria: 1) Being situated at less than 200 km from the centres of two or more metropolitan areas, or cities with more than 750,000 inhabitants in their functional area. This implies that the IP is not situated on the outer margins of Europe. 2) Having a 45 minute population potential (defined in the same way as for SPA, see above) of less than 1,5 million persons. This excludes the metropolitan areas situated in proximity to other metropolitan areas and 3) Having a travel time of more than 75 minutes to centres of metropolitan areas with more than 750,000 inhabitants in their functional area. This excludes the labour market areas directly connected to these metropolitan areas.

Outermost Regions (OR):

As OR are defined on an institutional basis (EU treaties), their delineation is given. However, the approach towards OR that has prevailed to date is not adequate for GEOSPECS.

Firstly, it is necessary to consider each OR within its geographic context. Typically, they are represented as European isolates, in specific frames along the edge of the map of the European continent in which their respective geographic context does not appear. This means that it is not possible to analyse how they relate to neighbouring territories, e.g. in terms of flows, differences in development levels and wider economic production systems.

Secondly, the spatial scale used to date does not allow analysis of the internal territorial structures of the outermost regions. The strong gradients of wealth and development between main urban centres and more peripheral parts of these regions are therefore ignored. Furthermore, a cartographic representation at which individual LAU 2 units can be discerned is necessary to observe possible differences between mountain and lowland, coast and inland, sparsely and densely populated areas in these regions.

Border areas:

GEOSPECS identified a series of different types of border effects. Because the ranges of mobility and interaction associated to each type of border effects is different, it is not meaningful to produce a general delineation of border areas.

Instead, the notion of border area is a geographic category with variable geometry. In general, a 45-minute travel distance to a border corresponds to a reasonable proxy for the maximum generally accepted commuting and daily mobility distance, which will therefore play a key role for a large range of socio-economic processes.

Cross-Border Metropolitan Regions (CBMR):

The delineation of CBMR considers regions that are “metropolitan” (i.e. which include one or more urban centres that are part of globalised economic networks and exert an influence over their regional or national area) and have a significant cross-border dimension (i.e. each “side” of the border contains no less than 10% of the population of the whole CBMR). Following this selection process, the 11 following metropolises are recognised as CBMR in Europe: Aachen-Liege-Maastricht, Basel, Geneva, Copenhagen-Malmö, Lille, Luxembourg, Nice-Monaco-San Remo, Saarbrücken, Strasbourg and Vienna-Bratislava.



Map template for the representation of the internal geographic structures of Outermost Regions: Example of French Guyana.

The EU treaties list the following OR: Guadeloupe, French Guyana, Réunion, Martinique, Saint Barthélemy, Saint Martin, the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands.



Example of a CBMR: Saarbrücken. Map taken from the “web atlas of cross-border metropolitan regions” by CEPS/INSTEAD.

The analytical framework

GEOSPECS seeks to understand how each category of geographic specificity may influence socioeconomic development processes. However, these relations can potentially be infinite. Hence it is necessary to define a narrower set of research questions (and/or research hypotheses) to be explored in the project.

In view of constructing a coherent analysis of the social and economic significance of geographic specificities and their potential policy relevance, the research questions have been compiled in an **analytical framework**. This draws on two sources: the transversal themes of GEOSPECS, and the outcomes of the stakeholder consultation undertaken in the first year of the project. In a first step, all project partners developed a set of research questions for their transversal themes (see list of themes in box on the right). Afterwards, the research questions and hypotheses were adapted according to the priorities identified in the stakeholder consultation. In this way, the analytical framework has been designed to provide a coherent basis for the analysis of different categories of geographic specificity. It will shed light not only on the specific characteristics of and major differences between the seven GEOSPECS categories, but also on their commonalities, allowing for a general discourse on territorial diversity and its political implications.

The analytical framework can be viewed in the [Interim Report](#). In the next phase of the project, these hypotheses will be tested by quantitative and qualitative methods.

The consultation process

We would like to thank all stakeholders who provided us with their views during the stakeholder consultation process. All input has been valuable and was utilised in formulating the research questions in the analytical framework. A detailed overview of the outcomes of the consultation (i.e. the most important challenges, opportunities and policy priorities for each GEOSPECS category) can be seen in the [Interim Report](#).

The priorities identified evidently differ significantly from one geographic specificity to the next, and only few common issues emerge. One challenge named for almost all categories of geographic specificity was low accessibility (compared to “mainstream” areas), leading to higher costs for transport. Many stakeholders also mentioned a decline of population as a challenge (the important exception being coastal areas, where population is increasing). On the other hand, tourism and/or the exploitation of natural resources was viewed as an opportunity in many areas (less so for border areas).



Photos: Dirk Beyer, CHG, Helena Downton

The **Transversal Themes** of GEOSPECS are:

- Economic vulnerability and regional resilience
- Accessibility and Services of General Interest
- Role of Information and Communication Technologies
- Residential attractiveness
- Regional identity and cultural heritage as factors of development
- Biodiversity and Protected Areas as factors for development
- Natural resource exploitation
- Vulnerability and adaptation of human-environment systems to climate change

Case study areas

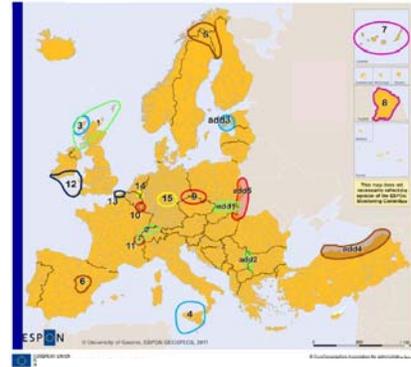
In the case studies, the proposed research questions will be addressed in more detail. They will make it possible to relate the general results to the perception of local realities. The comparatively large number of case studies reflects a conviction that in-depth analyses of local and regional situations offer important keys to understanding the role of geographic specificities in Europe.

The case study areas are:

- For mountain areas: the Highlands and Islands (UK) and the Jura massif (France and Switzerland)
- For islands: the Outer Hebrides (UK) and Sicily (Italy)
- For sparsely populated areas: Tornedalen (Sweden and Finland) and Central Spain
- For Outermost Regions: the Canary Islands (Spain) and French Guyana (France)
- For border regions: the Czech-Polish-German border, the Luxembourg cross-border metropolitan area and the Geneva cross-border metropolitan area
- For coastal areas: the Celtic Sea (Ireland) and the Belgian coast
- For Inner Peripheries: Parkstad (the Netherlands) and the rural area in the heart of the metropolitan Saxony triangle (Germany).

Besides, five so-called “additional cases” have been proposed in the EU-12 and candidate countries. These “additional cases” are not complete case studies of a GEOSPECS area. Instead, the partners will focus on a specific theme within the chosen areas. These are:

- For mountain areas: The Tatra region (Poland and Slovakia) with a focus on the impact of Protected Areas networking on biodiversity, as well as the West Stara Planina (Bulgaria and Serbia) with a focus on landscape and biodiversity as a resource for development
- Islands: Saaremaa in Estonia and Gozo in Malta, with a focus on current debates on the construction of a fixed link
- Sparsely populated areas: The sparsely populated coast along the Black Sea in Turkey, with a focus on climate change mitigation
- Border areas: The Polish-Ukrainian border, with a focus on issues related to regional identity.



Case study areas and “additional cases” of GEOSPECS

Events relating to GEOSPECS areas in Europe

EP Intergroup 174 meeting on 3 February 2011

On 3rd February 2011 the European Parliament Intergroup on mountains, islands and sparsely populated areas held a meeting on “Territorial cohesion and services of general interest” with a keynote speech by Commissioner Michel Barnier. At this meeting, the project coordinator Dr. Erik Gløersen presented GEOSPECS to the Parliamentarians.

More information on the meeting (including the presentations) and on the EP Intergroup 174 can be found on the website: <http://intergroup174.com/>



Conference “Managing Alpine Future II” in November 2011

The international conference “Managing Alpine Future II” will take place in Innsbruck, 21-23 November 2011. It is co-hosted by the University of Innsbruck and the Institute for Mountain Research: Man and Environment of the Austrian Academy of Science.

More information: www.alpinefuture.com



Euromontana conference on sustainable tourism in September 2011

An international conference on sustainable tourism in mountain areas will take place in Inverness, Scotland, 27-28 September 2011. It is organised by Euromontana, More information: www.euromontana.org

Signing of the “Pact of Islands” on 12 April

Representatives from 40 island authorities gathered in the Committee of the Regions in Brussels on 12 April to sign the “Pact of islands”. This is a political commitment of European islands to develop Local Sustainable Energy Action Plans and identify bankable green projects with the aim of meeting or exceeding the EU sustainability targets for the year 2020.

You can read the press release [here](#).



Seminar on cross-border metropolitan regions on 2 May 2011

A seminar with the title "Territorial Agenda, First Action Programme: Polycentric cross-border metropolitan regions – the project METROBORDER" was organized on 2 May 2011 at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels. It presented the results of the METROBORDER project, followed by a panel discussion on the prospects of CBMRs.

Seminar on the use of EU funds in Outermost Regions

On 14 February 2011, a seminar on "How to better articulate the EDF and the ERDF instruments for strengthening OR's regional integration" took place in Brussels. It gathered representatives of Outermost Regions, of the Commission and of the EEA, who discussed difficulties encountered by Outermost Regions. The minutes of the meeting can be downloaded [here](#).

EU grants €2 million to overseas biodiversity projects

The European Commission is to give an additional €2 million to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services in its Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories under the BEST scheme. The full press release can be found [here](#).