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## PRESS RELEASE

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### ISLANDS, MOUNTAINS AND SPARSELY-POPULATED AREAS TO SET UP SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP IN EU PARLIAMENT

An initiative aiming to set up a parliamentary inter-group gathering Members of the European Parliament representing various EU regions beset by permanent and severe geographic or demographic constraints was announced in the Western Isles of Scotland last week.

Speaking in the framework of the annual conference of the “**Islands Commission**” of the **Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions**, which was held in Stornoway on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> May 2009, Mr **Alyn Smith**, Member of the outgoing European Parliament representing Scotland, declared his intention to contact colleagues interested in such an initiative as soon as the new Parliament will meet, following the forthcoming European elections. The aim of such an inter-group would be to make the European institutions more aware of the plight of territories such as islands, mountains and sparsely-populated areas, and to ensure that the provisions of article 158 of the Treaty, which specifies that “*special attention*” must be paid to such areas, are fully taken on board in future EU legislation. This initiative was welcomed by **Angus Campbell**, Leader of the Outer Hebrides Council (*Comhairle nan Eilean Siar*), and applauded by the conference delegates, coming from islands as far apart as Martinique, the Aegean, Gotland and the Balearics.

“*Such an intergroup would gather a substantial number of MEPs, and prove to be an influential fighting force, especially if the Lisbon Treaty – which strengthens the co-decision powers of the European Parliament – is at long last ratified*”, commented **Jean-Didier Hache**, Executive Secretary of the CPMR Islands Commission.

It was observed that whilst Europe was prepared to allow Member States to spend €3000 Billion to meet the financial crisis, a dogmatic application of State Aids rules was often imposed on island farmers or fishermen who hardly posed any threat in terms of competition.

The assembly, which was addressed by representatives of the national authorities of Sweden, Malta, Cyprus and Greece, concluded that only an adapted EU policy would enable territories beset by specific geographic or demographic constraints to seize opportunities, and better their condition within the European Union.

The exploitation of renewable energy, an issue of key importance to the Outer Hebrides, was highlighted by Mr **Brian Wilson**, former UK Energy Minister, as a perfect example of such opportunities.

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