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European Ultrapерiphery at the 1988 Conference of Madeira: The Start of Something “New?”

ABSTRACT

The accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1986 brought their overseas regions into the Community's framework, prompting renewed discussions about the European status of these territories. While the 1988 Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR) in Madeira is remembered as a turning point by regional leaders, this article critically examines its actual role in shaping the “outermost regions” status, which was formally recognized in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. Existing scholarship, primarily from legal and institutional perspectives, tends to overlook the socio-historical processes underlying the construction of this status. This study adopts a constructivist approach, analyzing archival records from relevant decision-making institutions, contemporary media, and memoirs to address this research gap. It argues that while the Madeira Conference played an important role as a bottom-up lobbying effort to advocate for a Community-based status, the narrative of its centrality often overlooks key factors. These include the broader context of European institutions' pre-existing initiatives addressing overseas regions through national frameworks and the internal opposition within these regions to European integration. The article contends that the conference's most enduring legacy certainly lies in fostering a transnational network of regional leaders, which ultimately succeeded in institutionalizing the status of outermost regions in the Maastricht Treaty. By broadening the spatial and temporal scope of analysis, this study contributes to the historiography of the intersections between European integration and postcolonialism, extending its implications into contemporary contexts.

BY

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“Mayotte is Europe, and Europe will not abandon you.”

On December 16, 2024, after Cyclone Chido devastated Mayotte, the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, delivered the preceding statement before observing a minute of silence.¹ Mayotte, located off the coast of Mozambique and Madagascar, is both a French *département* and, since 2014, an outermost region of the European Union (EU). This latter status is particularly intriguing as it encompasses territories that are former colonies of France, Spain, and Portugal, such as Mayotte, Réunion, Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, Saint-Martin, the Azores, the Canary Islands, and Madeira. These regions differ from Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) like Greenland, New Caledonia, or Curaçao, which are associated with the EU since 1957 and do not benefit from key instruments such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This article examines the formation of the outermost regions’ status during the late 1980s, culminating in its official recognition in an annex declaration of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty.²

Defining the Outermost Regions in a Historical Perspective

The outermost regions of the EU have predominantly been studied by legal scholars. Emmanuel Jos and Justin Daniel, professors at the University of the French Antilles, were pioneers in this field as early as 1995. According to their analysis, “ultrapерiphery” represents a delicate balance between the application of European law and the numerous derogations required by these regions’ unique socio-economic challenges.³ They argue that being an “outermost region” is less about a distinct legal status and more about facilitating EU policy implementation. Others suggest ultraperipheries constitutes a legal exception within the EU institutional framework.⁴ Additionally, debates exist regarding the

1 Gerald Imray, Thomas Adamson and Rainat Aliloiffa, “France rushes aid to Mayotte after Cyclone Chido leaves hundreds feared dead,” AP News, December 17, 2024. <https://www.ap.org/news-highlights/spotlights/2024/france-rushes-aid-to-mayotte-after-cyclone-chido-leaves-hundreds-feared-dead/>.

2 Jacques Ziller, “Les ‘Outre-Mer de l’Union Européenne,’” in *Revue de l’Union Européenne* 610, no. Juillet-Aout (2017): 408–18. The current status for the outermost regions is defined in Article 349 of *The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*, Official Journal of the European Union, December 13, 2007, Lisbon, 150. Available at https://www.cvce.eu/obj/treaty_on_the_functioning_of_the_european_union_consolidated_version_2007-en-e49fd232-e12a-4a45-924e-1b35b3631f94.html.

3 Justin Daniel, and Emmanuel Jos, “Les régions ultrapéphériques face à l’union européenne: les difficultés de l’harmonisation dans la différence,” *Annuaire des Collectivités Locales* 15, no. 1 (1995): 23–50. <https://doi.org/10.3406/coloc.1995.1183>.

4 Didier Blanc, “L’Union Européenne et Ses Outre-Mer Intégrés: Quand l’Exception Devient Commune” in *L’exception En Droit de l’Union Européenne*, ed. Eric Carpano and Gaelle Marti (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2019), 267–86; Isabelle Vestris, *Le statut des régions ultrapéphériques de l’Union européenne: la construction d’un modèle attractif et perfectible d’intégration différenciée* (Bruylants, 2012).

alignment of national constitutional statuses with the European classification of these regions. For instance, Jacques Ziller highlights how Greenland's withdrawal from the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1985 illustrates that a region's European status can evolve independently of its national affiliation.⁵ While this body of research provides valuable insights, it generally treats the outermost regions' status as a *fait accompli*, without delving into its historical construction.

More recently, in his study of business interest representation of overseas regions in the EU, political scientist Willy Beauvallet briefly outlined the emergence of the outermost regions' status in the late 1980s. He emphasizes both the legal dimensions as well as the coordinated involvement of the European Commission, national and regional governments to develop a framework that ensured the continued integration of these regions into the EEC.⁶ This included providing specific funds and the formalization of specific derogations, such as dock dues. Similarly, Thibault Joltreau, drawing primarily on sources from European and national institutions, highlights the perceived threat posed by a potential deeper European integration of the French overseas *départements* (DOM).⁷ Nevertheless, this body of work addresses the question only as background context to their own political science questions. Consequently, it offers a limited analysis of the complex formation of this status in the late 1980s, especially overlooking the role of local agents and their transnational cooperation. This article seeks to fill that gap by examining how the status was conceptualized and institutionalized within the European Communities, grounded on archival records, memoirs, and contemporary press from France, Portugal and the European Communities.

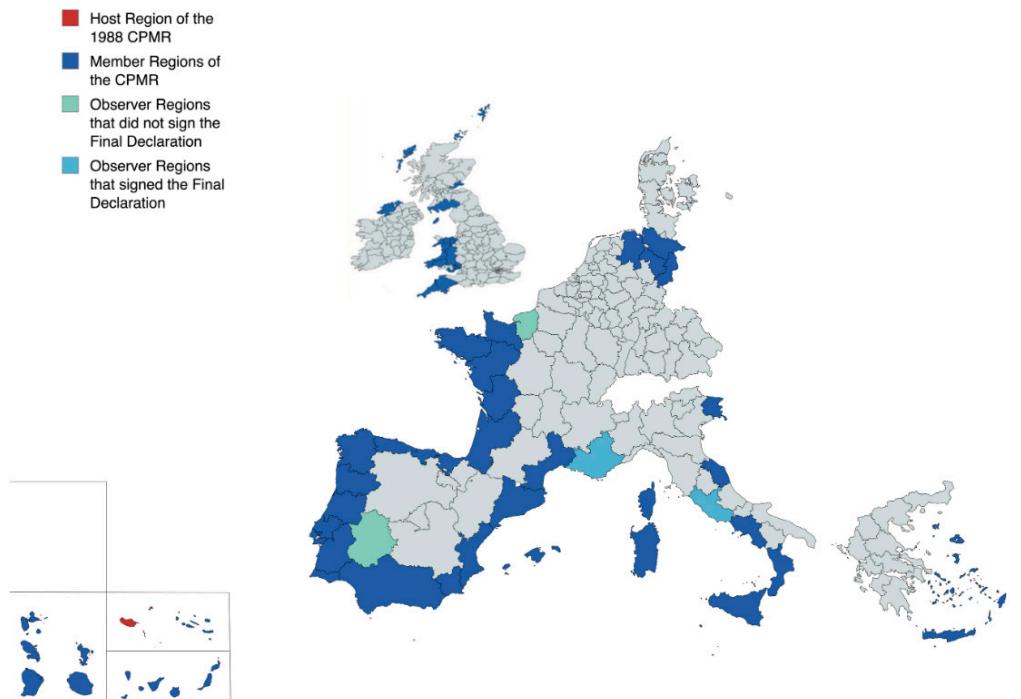
When it comes to researching the birth of the outermost regions status, many stakeholders at the time refer to the defining moment constituted by the 1988 Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR) in Madeira. During the conference, six presidents of overseas regions within the EEC advocated for a Community-based status for ultraperipheral regions. Their proposal aimed to secure aid measures and exemptions from Single Market rules, addressing the development issues of these territories. This initiative's success in the following

5 Ziller, "Les 'Outre-Mer de l'Union Européenne,'" 414.

6 Willy Beauvallet, "Out of Sight, but Close to the Heart of Power : Mobilising Politically for French Overseas Territories in Strasburg and Brussels" in *Political Sociology Perspectives on Lobbying in the EU*, ed. Cécile Robert and Willy Beauvallet (Palgrave Macmillan, 2025), 170-175.

7 Thibault Joltreau, "Gouverner l'agriculture ultramarine : Une économie politique de l'agro-industrie canne-sucre-rhum des départements français d'outre-mer," (PhD diss., University of Bordeaux, 2023), 121-131.

decade cemented the conference as a turning point in recognizing the outermost regions⁸.



[Fig. 1 : Participating regions in the 1988 Madeira Conference.⁹]

Held on November 24–25, 1988, at the Savoy Hotel in Funchal, the conference gathered 227 participants representing 56 regions from various Member States like Greece, the United Kingdom or Spain. These insular or coastal regions, characterized by their maritime nature, claimed to share common development challenges because of their distance from the European Megalopolis. The conference also involved representatives from European institutions, such as the Commission and Parliament, as well as organizations like the European Center for Regional Development (CEDRE). While the conference's immediate context was the 1988 European Structural Funds' reform to prepare for the Single Market in 1993, its enduring significance lies in its role in advocating for the outermost regions' status. The late 1980s marked a period of both deepening and enlargement for the European Communities, under the

⁸ For various accounts, see Jean-Didier Hache, *Quel statut pour les îles d'Europe?* (L'Harmattan, 2000), 108 ; Fernando Fernández Martín, *Îles et régions ultrapéphériques de l'Union européenne* (Éditions de l'Aube, 1999), 104 ; Gobierno de Canarias. “La Coopération Entre Les Régions Ultrapéphériques: L'Opération Cadre Régional RUP plus,” 2008, 6.

⁹ According to “Textes votés à Funchal (Madere) par la CRPM,” November 25, 1988, Madère 1988, CRPM, Rennes and “Liste des participants,” November 15, 1988, Madère 1988, CRPM, Rennes. Map realized with mapchart.net.

mandate of Jacques Delors, then President of the European Commission.¹⁰ This “European relaunch” included the 1986 Single European Act and the accession of Spain and Portugal, signaling both institutional reforms and geographical expansion.¹¹

Framing a Transnational History of European Integration

Nowadays, the history of European integration has embraced the transnational turn. Laurence Badel defines transnational history as a perspective that moves beyond the nation-state as the unit of analysis, focusing instead on dynamics that transcend borders like the circulation and transfer of people, objects, ideas, and practices.¹² In that regard, she identifies France’s René Girault as a pioneer in studying early European integration networks, while Wolfram Kaiser and Kiran Klaus Patel have advanced transnational perspectives in Germany. Patel, in particular, calls for “provincializing the European Union,” to better understand integration dynamics within a multiplicity of European organizations.¹³ These approaches inform this article’s investigation of the outermost regions, emphasizing on the role of transnational networks in shaping European policy.¹⁴

Colonial legacies are another crucial dimension of this study. Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson have examined the concept of “Eurafrica,” scrutinizing colonial dynamics in European integration’s intellectual, economic, and diplomatic foundations, as promoted by figures like Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi and later Léopold Sédar Senghor.¹⁵ However, this colonial perspective remains contested. Laurent Warlouzet critiques the reliance on limited institutional

10 Koen Van Zon, Matthew Broad, Aleksandra Komornicka, Paul Reef, Alessandra Schimmel, and Jorrit Steehouder, “The Era of Transformation and Treaties, 1987-2007,” in *The Unfinished History of European Integration*, 2nd ed., (Amsterdam University Press, 2024), 129–56.

11 Sophie Vanhoonacker, “The Making of the European Union,” in *The Cambridge History of the European Union*, ed. Mathieu Segers and Steven Van Hecke, (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 93–117.

12 Laurence Badel, *Écrire l’histoire Des Relations Internationales. Genèses, Concepts, Perspectives XVIIIe-XXIe Siècle* (Armand Colin, 2024), 63–64.

13 Kiran Klaus Patel, “Provincialising European Union: Co-Operation and Integration in Europe in a Historical Perspective,” *Contemporary European History* 22, no. 4 (November 2013): 649–73.

14 Wolfram Kaiser has advocated for the cross-disciplinary study of transnational networks in shaping European public policy in Wolfram Kaiser, “Bringing History Back In To the Study of Transnational Networks in European Integration,” *Journal of Public Policy* 29, no. 2 (August 2009): 223–39.

15 Peo Hansen, and Stefan Jonsson. *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism*, (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014).

archives,¹⁶ while Kiran Klaus Patel warns against teleological interpretations of European integration through a strictly colonial lens.¹⁷

By adopting a constructivist approach to Public Action this article studies how the 1988 Madeira Conference contributed to the creation of the ultraperiphery status by the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht. Berger and Luckmann's emphasis on the objectification, institutionalization and legitimization of problems underpins the analysis.¹⁸ The Madeira Conference is shown to have marked a turning point from nationally-centered approaches to the emergence of a transnational network of former colonies advocating for a Community-based response to shared challenges.

The Madeira Conference as a Turning Point in Constructing Ultrapерiphery

What was the concept of “ultrapерiphery” in 1988? According to François Grosrichard, a journalist at *Le Monde*, this term was used by the Regional Government of Madeira to justify benefiting from a special regime while remaining part of the EEC.¹⁹ This approach was uncanny compared to other overseas territories of Member States: the Faroe Islands declined to join the EEC, and Greenland held a referendum in 1982 to leave the Community.²⁰

The term ultraperiphery was first introduced by Mota Amaral at the 1987 CPMR's Islands Commission in Réunion. According to various accounts, he described these islands as, “the periphery of the periphery, or ultra-periphery.”²¹ This sentence referenced their extreme geographical remoteness from mainland Europe as well as the “periphery” part of the CPMR's name, thus reinforcing the idea of a political construct developed within the CPMR's Islands Commission.

At the Madeira Conference, six presidents of these ultraperipheral regions were present, as shown in the photograph below (Fig. 2). These leaders represented nearly half of the thirteen regional presidents attending the

16 Laurent Warlouzet, “L'histoire de l'intégration Européenne Au-Delà Du Tournant Critique,” in *Histoire@Politique*, no. 51 (December 20th 2023), 2.

17 Kiran Klaus Patel, “Widening and deepening? Recent advances in European Integration History,” in *Neue Politische Literatur* 64, 2, (2019), 354.

18 Peter L. Berger, and Thomas Luckmann. *Social Construction of Reality : A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Penguin Books Limited, 1991), 207.

19 François Grosrichard, “Vivre à Madère,” in *Le Monde*, January 15, 1989.

20 Jacques Ziller, “Les États européens et les territoires ultra-marins placés sous leur souveraineté,” in *Les Nouveaux Cahiers du Conseil constitutionnel* 35, no. 2 (2012): 179-80.

21 Hache, *Quel statut pour les îles d'Europe?*, 108; Fernández Martín, *Îles et régions ultrapéphériques de l'Union européenne*, 46. In the source, in French, it is written “la périphérie de la périphérie, ou ultra-périphérie.”



[Fig. 2 : Anonymous, “Os seis presidentes das ilhas Ultra-Periféricas reuniram-se no Funchal e identificaram problemas comuns,” November 26, 1988.^{23]}]

The picture above, published in the *Diario de Noticias Madeira* with the title, *The Presidents of the Ultraperipheral Islands meet in Funchal and Identify their Common Issues*, underscores the shared interests of these diverse islands, unified by their distance from mainland Europe. At this time, each region’s GDP per capita was below 75% of the European Community average, making them all eligible for ERDF aid.²⁴ An accompanying article explains their purpose:

The declaration begins by noting that the “very open and friendly exchange of views enabled the identification of common problems among the six participating island regions.” “Being the most remote regions of the EEC,

22 “Liste des participants,” November 15, 1988, Madère 1988, CRPM, Rennes.

23 From left to right, there were Pierre Lagourgue (Réunion), Mota Amaral (Azores), Alberto Jardim (Madeira and the host of the Conference), Félix Proto (Guadeloupe), Fernando Fernández Martín (Canary Islands), and Camille Darsières (Martinique). Published in Anonymous, “Alberto Joao Jardim reeleito presidente da Conferência das Regiões Periféricas e Marítimas,” *Diário de Notícias Madeira*, November 26, 1988, PT-ABM-COLJOR-DN_19881127, Arquivo e Biblioteca da Madeira, Funchal, 1. https://biblioteca-abm.madeira.gov.pt/media/publicacoesPeriodicas/Jornais/DiarioNoticias/1988/PT-ABM-COLJOR-DN_19881126.pdf.

24 “Troisième rapport périodique de la Commission sur la situation et l’évolution socio-économique des régions de la communauté,” May 21, 1987, SGCI, 19930226/25, Archives Nationales, Saint-Denis, 85.

further marked by the serious problems arising from insularity, the six presidents consider it absolutely essential—especially with the approach of 1992 and the Single Market—to call upon European leaders and the public opinion of the Community to provide an adequate response to their specific problems.”²⁵

The presidents demanded measures tailored to their circumstances, beyond the usual ERDF aid. They highlighted the smallness of their own markets, which prevented agricultural economies of scale, the high costs of transportation, and the fiscal challenges posed by the 1993 Single Market and its abolition of border controls.²⁶ Specifically, they expressed concern that the Single Market could eliminate the dock dues taxes, called *octroi de mer* in French overseas regions and *arbitrios fiscales* in the Canary Islands.²⁷ They constitute a colonial-era tax on imports (exempting local goods) collected by local authorities, which constituted for them a significant revenue.²⁸ They were threatened by the 1993 Single Market, as it risked being classified as a prohibited internal customs duty.²⁹ As a result, they stressed the need for targeted derogations to address their geographical disadvantages and achieve parity in living standards with mainland Europe.

This process aligns with Felstiner, Abel and Sarrat’s framework of “Naming, Blaming and Claiming.”³⁰ Here the Naming is giving a name to their particular condition by a process of objectivation through the concept of ultraperipherity. Blaming refers to the Single Market that might make them lose some fiscal revenues and endanger the future of these islands. While Claiming is calling upon

25 “Alberto Joao Jardim reeleito presidente da Conferência das Regioes Periféricas e Marítimas,” *Diário de Notícias Madeira*, 7. In original Portuguese: “A declaração começa por referir que a “troca de impressões realizada, muito aberta e amistosa, permitiu identificar problemas comuns das seis Regioes Insulares participantes.” “Sendo estas as Regioes da CEE mais afastadas, marcadas’ ainda por cima pelos graves problemas derivados da insularidade, entendem os seis presidentes ser absolutamente prioritário, na perspectiva da aproximação de 1992 e do Mercado Único, desafiar os responsáveis europeus e a própria opinião publica da Comunidade, a dar resposta adequada aos respectivos problemas específicos.””

26 Ibid., 6; Laurent Warlouzet, “The Implementation of the Single Market Programme, 1985-1992” in *Reshaping Europe: Towards a Political, Economic and Monetary Union, 1984-1989*, ed. Michael Gehler and Wilfried Loth, (Nomos Verlag, 2020), 248-249.

27 Ziller, “Les ‘Outre-Mer de l’Union Européenne,” 417.

28 Georges Othily, *Les régions d’outre-mer et l’Europe* (Sénat, 1991), 20 ; Jean-Christophe Gay, “Chapitre 2. De l’état de colonies aux statuts à la carte,” in *La France d’outre-mer* (Armand Colin, 2021), 59 ; Joltreau, “Gouverner l’agriculture ultramarine : Une économie politique de l’agro-industrie canne-sucre-rhum des départements français d’outre-mer,” 126.

29 Joltreau, Ibid., 127 ; Beauvallet, “Out of Sight, but Close to the Heart of Power : Mobilising Politically for French Overseas Territories in Strasburg and Brussels,” 175.

30 William L.F. Felstiner, Richard L. Abel, and Austin Sarat. “The Emergence and Transformation of Disputes: Naming, Blaming, Claiming” *Law & Society Review* 15, no. 3/4 (1980): 631-54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3053505>.

European leaders to design a specific status for them, insisting on their shared insularity.

The emphasis on insularity as an objectivation tool is notable, as all these regions are members of the Islands Commission of the CPMR. French Guiana, however, was not part of the Commission and did not participate in the president's meeting. Contemporary press and pictures never mention Georges Othily, then president of French Guiana's Regional Council, as a participant in the meeting, though he was present at the conference. His participation is only noted in later memoirs from Fernando Fernández Martín,³¹ and Alberto Jardim.³² The exclusion of French Guiana from the definition of ultraperipherity in 1988 suggests further that this status was initially shaped within the CPMR's Islands Commission. Another televised news report from RFO Paris (*Radio France Outre-mer*) covered this conference. By highlighting the similarities between Madeira and Réunion, the report also stated that the six islands planned to adopt a unified position the following year. Their goal was to secure derogations under the proposed Single Market.³³ This particular definition of ultraperipherity at the Madeira Conference highlights how it definitely constitutes a Public Action construct.

One other notable element of those ultraperipheral islands lies within their former colonial status. Nélio Mendonça, President of the Legislative Assembly of Madeira since 1984, gave the opening speech of the Madeira Conference:

These tiny islands, with a population of less than three hundred thousand inhabitants, economically dependent, within the context of the existential cycle of the Portuguese nation, share with the mainland Portugal a feeling of *portugality* and aspects of the past that made the Portugal of the Age of the Discovery a flourishing and powerful empire.³⁴

31 Fernández Martín, *Îles et régions ultrapériphériques de l'Union européenne*, 104.

32 Alberto Joao Jardim, *Relatório de combate* (Don Quixote, 2017), 327-328.

33 Anne-Marie Masquin and Jean-Christophe Clément, *Pierre Lagourgue à la conférence périphérique de Madère*, JT 20h Télé Réunion, December 2 1988. (Available at INA, Paris, ref: VDO11033020).

34 "XVI Conferências Regiões Periféricas Marítimas da CEE decorre no Funchal," in *Jornal da Madeira*, November 25, 1988, 6. In original Portuguese : "Estas pequenas ilhas com uma população que não atinge as três centenas de milhar de habitantes, economicamente dependente, no contexto do ciclo existencial da nação portuguesa, têm em comum com Portugal Continental, o sentimento de portugaldade e trechos do passado que fizeram do Portugal dos descobrimentos um florescente e poderoso império."

The speech transcript was published in the *Jornal da Madeira*, a diocesan newspaper closely aligned with regional political power.³⁵ While Nélio Mendonça celebrated Madeira's colonial heritage as a shared national identity, such narratives contrasted with Lisbon's efforts to reframe its global position following the end of the *Estado Novo* regime after endless colonial wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau.³⁶ According to this opening speech, the link between colonialism and the European integration of Portugal becomes more ambiguous, and it is the same for the other regions. For instance, a later 1991 report written by Georges Othily as a French Senator states that those ultraperipheral regions, whether French, Spanish or Portuguese, "are former colonies that escaped either independence through decolonization, or internal autonomy like the other overseas territories."³⁷ This highlights that these regions are part of the European Communities, even though they are located far away from the European continent, first and foremost because they are former colonies, or even "post-colonial spaces" as Françoise Vergès puts it.³⁸

The 1988 Madeira Conference played a pivotal role in shaping the concept of ultraperipherality, uniting six regional leaders through a transnational network to address shared challenges and advocate for a unified yet constructed status within the European communities. Their coordinated demands for Single Market derogations and notable overrepresentation at the Madeira Conference highlighted a collective push to establish this distinct designation. Yet, closer examination reveals inconsistencies and complexities, challenging the notion that the ultraperipherality concept emerged entirely as a bottom-up initiative from regional leaders directed towards European institutions.

More a Milestone than a Beginning : Reassessing the Madeira Conference's Contribution

A Conference Beyond Ultrapерiphery Issues

The 1988 Madeira Conference was not exclusively centered on ultraperipheral islands. The vast majority of the 56 participating regions were located in mainland Europe and, whether insular or coastal, did not share any contiguous border.

35 Teresa Ruel, *Political Alternation in the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 77.

36 Yves Léonard, *Histoire du Portugal contemporain de 1890 à nos jours* (Chandeigne, 2016), 201.

37 Othily, *Les régions d'outre-mer et l'Europe*, 7. In original French : "[Les Canaries, Madère et les régions françaises d'outre-mer] sont d'anciennes colonies qui ont échappé soit à l'indépendance dans le cadre de la décolonisation, soit à l'autonomie interne comme les territoires d'outre-mer."

38 Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel and Sandrine Lemaire (ed.), *La Fracture coloniale. La société française au prisme de l'héritage colonial* (La Découverte, 2005), 71.

The conference agenda encompassed a broad range of topics beyond issues specific to overseas regions, as shown in Figure 3 below.

Day	Time	Theme	Discussed topics
November 24	Morning	Aftermath of the 1987 La Réunion Conference	Assessment of the action taken and debate
	Afternoon	Proposals for actions aimed at strengthening the European policy of key sectors.	Support of traditional and threatened activities in peripheral and maritime regions
			Aerial and maritime means of transport
			Strengthening the EEC's coastal policy
			Specific policy towards the islands
November 25	Morning	Continuation of the promotional actions of the CPMR.	New technologies and interregional cooperation
			Reinforcement of actions towards youth
			Promoting regional cultures and cultural tourism
	Morning	Internal organization and functioning of the CPMR	Working relations CPMR - AER - CEDRE
			Renewal of the Bureau and of executive delegations
	Afternoon	Closing session	With the participation of European Commissioner Cardoso e Cunha

[Fig. 3 : Program of the 1988 Madeira Conference.³⁹]

Despite the host region's place within the ultraperiphery, references to ultraperipheral islands in the Final Declaration were minimal. Their specific issues appeared in only a few instances: a bullet point calling for a specific approach to their particular condition;⁴⁰ a resolution from French overseas regions demanding specific Single Market derogations and involvement in future Lomé Convention negotiations claiming to be supportive and united to "every underprivileged regions of the Community, especially the ultraperipheral regions of Azores, Canary Islands and Madeira";⁴¹ and a request for the Commission to fund half of a CEDRE study on air and maritime transport for French overseas regions and other Irish, Italian and Breton coastal islands.⁴² This final declaration does not mention at all the meeting between the six presidents of ultraperipheral

39 "Ordre du jour," November 24, 1988, Madère 1988, CRPM, Rennes.

40 "Textes votés à Funchal (Madere) par la CRPM," November 25, 1988, Madère 1988, CRPM, Rennes, 3.

41 Ibid., 11. In original French: "Réaffirment leur soutien et leur solidarité à l'ensemble des Régions défavorisées de la Communauté, en particulier aux Régions ultra-périphériques des Açores, des Iles Canaries et de Madère."

42 Ibid., 9.

islands. These limited mentions reflect that, while the Madeira Conference facilitated discussions among ultraperipheral islands, the event was dominated by wider issues.

Nevertheless, media coverage emphasized the ultraperiphery meeting. For instance, the *Diario de Notícias Madeira* dedicated a full page on November 26, 1988, to the meeting of presidents from the ultraperiphery.⁴³ In France, RFO aired two news reports focused on the ultraperiphery aspect of the Conference, mainly because this network is aimed at citizens from French overseas.⁴⁴ In his memoirs, Alberto Jardim later described the conference as the origin of ultraperipheral regions' collective advocacy, which would eventually gain recognition in European treaties.⁴⁵ However, the first official organization coordinating ultraperiphery's interests, the Outermost Regions' Conference of Presidents, was only established in 1995 in Guadeloupe.⁴⁶

While researching the birth of the EU's outermost regions, one should never forget what Pierre Bourdieu termed "biographical illusion"—the tendency to construct a coherent and linear narrative of one's life, even though it is largely shaped by contingent events and social structures.⁴⁷ In this case, the illusion lies in the bottom-up creation process of the outermost regions as told by the agents involved in its development. Thankfully, this illusion does not withstand the scrutiny of archival research. To sum it up, the Madeira Conference was not primarily focused on ultraperiphery, yet it remains one of the most documented aspects.

Beyond the Conference: Early Engagements and Contestations of the European Integration of Overseas Regions

European Communities' institutions had already engaged with these issues prior to the conference. For instance, Réunion was the first of the overseas regions to receive regional funding from the European Development Fund in 1961, receiving

43 "Alberto Joao Jardim reeleito presidente da Conferência das Regiões Periféricas e Marítimas," *Diário de Notícias Madeira*, 6.

44 Anne-Marie Masquin and Jean-Christophe Clément, *Pierre Lagourgue à la conférence périphérique de Madère*, JT 20h Télé Réunion, December 2 1988; Anne-Marie Masquin and Jean-Christophe Clément, *Latitudes*, RFO Paris, December 4, 1988. (Available at INA, Paris, ref: VDO15229510).

45 Jardim, *Relatório de combate*, 356.

46 "Déclaration des Présidents des Régions Ultrapériphériques," March 29, 1995, Gourbeyre. Available at https://cp-rup.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/library_files/1995_Declaraci%C3%B3n_de_Gourbeyre_-_Guadalupe_FR.pdf.

47 Pierre Bourdieu, "The Biographical Illusion (1986)" in *Biography in Theory: Key Texts with Commentaries*, ed. Wilhelm Hemecker and Edward Saunders (De Gruyter, 2017), 210-216.

172 million CFA francs⁴⁸ for a clean water project in Saint Denis.⁴⁹ In 1984 and 1985, the ERDF allocated 1.125 million French francs for a preparatory study for an integrated operation in Réunion.⁵⁰ Additionally, in 1985, the ERDF provided 12.1 million ECUs (European Currency Unit) to fund the endiguement of the *Rivière aux Herbes* and Pointe-à-Pitre's harbor renovation in Guadeloupe.⁵¹ Between 1980 and 1987, the ERDF allocated an average of 37.15 million ECUs annually to the French overseas regions, with amounts ranging from 1.3 million ECUs in 1980 to 87.6 million ECUs in 1983.⁵² Consequently, the European Communities had been funding these regions well before the Madeira Conference. However, this funding shifted from the European Development Fund to the ERDF. This change occurred because, on the one hand, the ERDF was only created in 1975⁵³ and on the other hand, the European Development Fund was primarily designed to aid ACP countries and OCTs.⁵⁴ According to Jean-Christophe Gay, the 1978 Hansen ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Communities granted the French overseas regions access to Internal Structural Funds, including the ERDF, following their inclusion in Article 227(2) of the Treaty of Rome.⁵⁵ This ruling explained the shift from the European Development Fund to the ERDF, although funding at that time was still primarily based on the territories' specific national status rather than a Community-based approach.

In addition to these funding initiatives, the European Commission established an interservice group in 1986 to focus on the DOM, OCTs, the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands, Ceuta, and Melilla. The group's role was to coordinate the efforts of various Directorates-General regarding these territories. Led by Giuseppe Ciavarini Azzi, a jurist working for the Commission since 1964, the idea for this group came directly from Jacques Delors after Spain and Portugal joined the Community in 1986 with their overseas regions.⁵⁶ Fernando Fernández Martín also acknowledged Jacques Delors' contribution in creating a group beyond national borders to include overseas regions within the European

48 The CFA franc is a colonial currency that was in use in Réunion until 1975.

49 Megan Brown, *The Seventh Member State: Algeria, France, and the European Community* (Harvard University Press, 2022), 170.

50 "Demande de crédits d'étude en faveur d'une opération intégrée à l'Île de la Réunion," June 27, 1984, 25POI/1/3289, 'La Réunion,' Archives diplomatiques, La Courneuve, 25.

51 "FEDER - Instruction des demandes de concours 1985 - Dossier GUADELOUPE," November 13, 1985, 25POI/1/3289, 'Guadeloupe,' Archives diplomatiques, La Courneuve, 8.

52 Othily, *Les régions d'outre-mer et l'Europe*, 13.

53 Kiran Klaus Patel, *Project Europe: A History* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 203.

54 "ACP" refers to African, Caribbean, and Pacific states linked to the EEC through the Lomé Conventions for trade and development cooperation.

55 Gay, "Chapitre 2. De l'état de colonies aux statuts à la carte," 58.

56 Giuseppe Ciavarini Azzi, "Entretien avec Giuseppe Ciavarini Azzi," interview by Anne-Sophie Gijs and Laurent Warlouzet, *Histoire de la Commission européenne 1986-2000*, September 30, 2016, 14-15. Available at https://archives.eui.eu/en/oral_history/INT983.

Communities.⁵⁷ Notably, this group's scope extended and included OCTs and Ceuta and Melilla, covering all territories outside the European mainland. As head of the group, Ciavarini Azzi visited Madeira in October 1988 to "understand, learn, and return to Brussels to present a report to the Commission, to President Delors, to think about the solutions," with no mention whatsoever of any other overseas territories, only Madeira.⁵⁸ Despite the formation of this interservice group, initiatives for these territories were still defined by national frameworks. For example, on June 4th and 5th, 1987, a "DOM Day" event was held in Brussels. During this event, Jacques Delors gave a speech connecting the issues of the French overseas regions to those of ACP countries. While he recognized the need to adapt the Single Market to the economic and social realities of the DOM, he also stated, "We are a community of law, and exemptions cannot be systematically granted,"⁵⁹ emphasizing that national governments remained the primary interlocutors.⁶⁰ Similarly, Alberto Jardim recalls having been received in Brussels in the beginning of May 1988 by Jacques Delors, alongside Mota Amaral as representatives of the Portuguese overseas regions. Their discussions centered on achieving parity in living standards with mainland Europe.⁶¹ Rather than addressing the issue community-wide, the European institutions gave solutions to those territories still according to their national affiliation. In summary, although the creation of the interservice group marked a step toward a more systematic, Community-based approach, the EEC's solutions still addressed overseas regions firmly through their respective Member States. Likewise, the 1987 Ligios Report by the European Parliament only dealt with the French overseas regions, offering no systematic or Community-based approach and excluding any reference to the remote territories of other Member States.⁶²

Also, the Madeira Conference was not the first attempt at constituting a transnational network of overseas regions. Fernando Fernández Martín recalls attending a different meeting in Fort-de-France (Martinique) in September 1988 with his counterparts from the French Americas: Georges Othily, Félix Proto, and

57 Fernández Martín, *Iles et régions ultrapériphériques de l'Union européenne*, 47.

58 "Missao das Comunidades Europeias visitou a Região Autônoma da Madeira," October 12, 1988, PT-ARM-DRAECE-DRACE/1/2/5, box no. 2, Arquivo e Biblioteca da Madeira, Funchal, 6. In original Portuguese: "...compreender, aprender e retornar a Bruxelas para fazer um relatório a Comissão, ao presidente Delors, para refletir sobre as soluções."

59 "Journées DOM - Discours de M. Jacques Delors Président de la Commission des Communautés Européennes," June 4-5, 1987, JD-60, Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence, 2. Original in French: "Nous sommes une communauté de droit et on ne peut accorder systématiquement des dérogations."

60 Ibid., 4.

61 Jardim, *Relatório de combate*, 348-49.

62 Giosuè Ligios, "Rapport sur les problèmes régionaux des départements d'outre-mer (D.O.M.)," March 12, 1987, PE2-18023, Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence.

Camille Darsières.⁶³ The following month, he met with Mota Amaral in the Azores. Furthermore, according to Emmanuel Jos and Justin Daniel, Réunion established a permanent office in Brussels in 1979,⁶⁴ making it the first regional office destined to the European Communities, predating the textbook example of the Saarland office set up in 1985.⁶⁵ Even though the Madeira Conference still marked the first time these six regional presidents gathered to address common challenges, it was not the first instance of discussing the status of these remote islands at the European level. As noted earlier, the term ultraperipherity itself was forged in Saint-Denis (Réunion) in 1987.

This linear narrative also overlooks significant opposition to the European integration of overseas regions. In 1988, Ernest Moutoussamy, a French MP and member of the autonomist Communist Party of Guadeloupe, published a book warning against integrating overseas *départements* into the Single Market. Using extensive statistics, he argued that France's overseas policy relies on maintaining their underdevelopment so as to maintain the dependence of these territories toward the *métropole*. He pointed out that GDP per capita in these regions averaged only 35% of France's,⁶⁶ with unemployment reaching up to 40% in Réunion,⁶⁷ and described integration as an, "imperialist policy [that] sacrifices the interests of development and aims at locking up the overseas *départements* even more, to make them the collective colonies of Europe where local populations will be dissolved within the huge amount of European foreigners."⁶⁸ Through its anti-colonialist and polemical tone, the book underscores genuine concerns about European integration of French overseas regions, including the potential removal of dock dues taxes which would increase the dependence of these regions on mainland France, as well as the challenges posed by rising

63 Fernández Martín, *Îles et régions ultrapériphériques de l'Union européenne*, 47.

64 Daniel and Jos, "Les régions ultrapériphériques face à l'union européenne: les difficultés de l'harmonisation dans la différence," 43.

65 Laurence Badel, "Pratiques diplomatiques européennes et mondialisations contemporaines," *Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe*, June 2020, accessed December 26, 2024. <https://ehne.fr/fr/node/14223>.

66 Ligios, "Rapport sur les problèmes régionaux des départements d'outre-mer (D.O.M.)," 6. According to the Ligios report, in 1983, the average GDP per capita for the French overseas regions was equivalent to 37,5% of the one of mainland France.

67 According to the Ligios Report, the unemployment rate was around 33% of the active population in Réunion, and above 30% of the active population in the other regions, except in French Guiana.

68 Ernest Moutoussamy, *Un Danger Pour Les DOM: L'intégration Au Marché Unique Européen de 1992* (L'Harmattan, 1988), 20. In original French: "Cette politique impérialiste sacrifie les intérêts du développement et vise à corseter davantage les DOM et à en faire des colonies collectives de l'Europe où les populations locales seront dissoutes dans la masse d'allogènes européens."

immigration in areas already struggling with high unemployment. However, such issues had already been raised in the 1960s.⁶⁹

Similar concerns arose in the Canary Islands. In December 1983, during negotiations for Spain's admission to the EEC, the archipelago's parliament approved the accession, provided that specific economic and fiscal exemptions were granted. Yet, in June 1985, the same institution rejected the Treaty of Accession, prompting the resignation of Jerónimo Saavedra, then President of the Canary Islands.⁷⁰ The principal concerns centered on the treaty's impact on agriculture and fisheries, as well as the potential threat to the island's economic and fiscal regime. The issue was later addressed through exemptions from the Customs Union, Common Agricultural Policy, Common Fisheries Policy, and VAT system, alongside tariff quotas for agricultural products and tobacco.⁷¹ This case illustrates that, despite a common claim to a status of ultraperiphery, these regions possess different legal arrangements within both their respective national frameworks and the European Community. More broadly, these instances challenge the idea that the integration of overseas regions into the European framework followed a linear, progressive, and bottom-up trajectory starting with the 1988 Madeira Conference, instead highlighting a contested and negotiated process.

While the 1988 Madeira Conference did not exclusively address issues related to overseas regions, and despite European institutions having engaged with these regions prior to the event, its significance lies in a critical shift. This marked a transition from European institutions focusing solely on nationally-defined overseas territories to the emergence of a transnational network. This collective bargaining can be interpreted as a form of "venue shopping,"⁷² wherein the agents involved, operating on the margins of the 1988 CPMR Conference in Madeira, recognized this platform as the most advantageous access point to the European polity. It provided better opportunities to advocate for their specific needs and interests within the European institutional framework, in contrast to relying on their respective national governments.

69 According to Megan Brown, in 1965, two German master mechanics and their wives were denied their visa renewals in Réunion after three years of living there. That decision was justified by the island's employment situation. See Brown, *The Seventh Member State: Algeria, France, and the European Community*, 209-10.

70 María Teresa Noreña Salto, "Canarias: De Comunidad Autónoma a Región Europea," *Boletín Millares Carlo*, no. 15 (1996): 419-420.

71 Bulletin of the European Communities, "Political agreement on the accession of Spain and Portugal," no. 3 (Office for official publications of the European Communities, 1985), 9. Available at https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/political_agreement_on_the_accession_of_spain_and_portugal_29_march_1985-en-2e881412-7fae-4566-88df-f2b26a03543e.html.

72 Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Towards a Community-based Approach after the Madeira Conference

In the aftermath of the Madeira Conference, the six ultraperipheral regions continued to advocate for a Community-based response to their challenges by maintaining interregional relations. For instance, archival records from Funchal reveal that Madeira's European Affairs Office exchanged information with the French overseas regions. Specifically, French Guiana, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Réunion shared with Madeira's Regional Government their revised dock dues rates for 1993 to comply with the new rules of the Single Market.⁷³ This is part of a common strategy among interest groups, which is the exchange of information.⁷⁴ Although these documents were sent nearly four years after the conference, there is little doubt that the meeting between the Presidents facilitated ongoing information exchanges on European matters among these regions. It is notable that all the presidents of the French overseas regions had changed since the Madeira Conference, with Guadeloupe and Réunion experiencing political alternations following the 1992 French regional elections. Although these new leaders did not participate in the Madeira Conference, they continued to maintain relationships with their Portuguese counterparts, demonstrating a “lock-in” effect toward European integration that persisted beyond political transitions.⁷⁵

Following the Madeira Conference, those regions still maintained strong ties and positions within the CPMR which organized the event. As such Alberto Jardim, President of Madeira and host of the 1988 Conference, remained president of the CPMR until 1996, still to this day the longest serving President of the organization. According to his autobiography, Jardim was elected during the 1987 Réunion Conference with the support of French Gaullists, following a longstanding strategy of Europeanization predating Portugal's entry into the EEC.⁷⁶ Likewise, in 1990, the President of CPMR's Islands Commission was Pierre Lagourgue from Réunion, with Mota Amaral from Azores and Jerónimo Saavedra

73 “Délibération portant adoption du tarif des droits d'octroi de mer appliqué dans le département de la Guyane,” October 5, 1992, PT-ARM-DRAECE/DRACE/A/2/6, Arquivo e Biblioteca da Madeira, Funchal. Under the same collection, the following documents are very similar but concern Guadeloupe, Martinique and Réunion.

74 Andreas Dür, “Interest Groups in the European Union: How Powerful Are They?,” *West European Politics* 31, no. 6 (November 2008): 1212–30.

75 Frank Schimmelfennig, “Transnational Socialization,” in *Transnational European Union: Towards a Common Political Space*, ed. Wolfram Kaiser and Peter Starke (Routledge, 2005), 76. Using the example of Central European countries, Schimmelfennig argues that the transnational socialization of their elites created strong ties to the European Union, which persisted even after political alternation.

76 Jardim, *Relatório de combate*, 325.

from the Canary Islands as two of the four Vice-Presidents of the Commission.⁷⁷ This configuration demonstrated the significant overrepresentation of outermost regions within the Islands Commission. Overall, the Madeira Conference catalyzed enduring links among these regions, fostering sustained collaboration through information exchange and shared platforms like the CPMR.

After the conference, these ultraperipheral regions were still considered through national frameworks, as proven by the aid programs launched by the Commission. In the late 1980s, three programs were launched by the European Commission, namely POSEIDOM for the French overseas regions, then POSEIMA for the Portuguese overseas regions and POSEICAN for the Canary islands,⁷⁸ mainly destined for agricultural production.⁷⁹ These programs were criticized via an unofficial document of the German delegation to the EEC, arguing that subsidies for non-profitable agricultural goods could hinder the Single Market and the Common Agricultural Policy.⁸⁰ While these programs remained nationally segmented, their symmetry marked a step toward a more Community-based approach for European overseas territories.

The earliest official document from the European institutions using the word “ultrapерipheral regions,” so far, was a decision on March 13th 1990 by the European Commission for the REGIS initiative directed towards them, referenced in a document from the French Bureau for European Economic Cooperation.⁸¹ Unlike the agricultural focus of the POSEI programs, REGIS aimed to diversify economic activities, strengthen links between these regions and the rest of the Community, foster cooperation with neighboring regions, and enhance, if possible, disaster resilience. This term, coming from lobbying efforts by these regions, took three years to integrate into European institutional jargon.

This status was definitely recognized in the Maastricht Treaty, on the 26th Annex Declaration. Unlike in the Madeira Conference, French Guiana is here included among the outermost regions. The declaration states that, due to, “major structural backwardness compounded by several phenomena

77 “Décisions administratives,” 1991, PT-ARM-DRAECE/CRIE/CC/1/295, Arquivo e Biblioteca da Madeira, Funchal.

78 The acronym ‘POSEI’ (“*Programme d’Options Spécifiques à l’Éloignement et à l’Insularité*” or programme of options specifically relating to remoteness and insularity) was initially coined for the DOM with an obvious mythological reference, before being adapted for Spanish and Portuguese overseas regions.

79 Jean-François Drevet, *Histoire de la politique régionale de l’Union européenne* (Belin, 2008), 95.

80 “Document officiel de la délégation allemande concernant POSEICAN et POSEIMA,” March 21, 1991, PT-ARM-DRAECE/DRACE/A/2/6, Arquivo e Biblioteca da Madeira, Funchal.

81 “Programme d’initiative communautaire REGIS,” March 19, 1991, SGCI, 19930226/27, Archives Nationales, Saint-Denis.

(remoteness, island status, small size, difficult topography and climate, economic dependence on a few products) [restraining] their economic and social development [...] it is nonetheless possible to adopt specific measures to assist them.”⁸² Basically, the declaration extended the Treaty of Rome’s Article 227(2) and the 1978 Hansen ruling provisions to Portuguese and Spanish overseas regions, thereby institutionalizing targeted derogations, and granting those overseas regions the recognition of a specific European status—that of outermost region in the English version of the treaty. So far, this appears to be the first account of this word as a translation for *ultrapérimérique*.⁸³

Perhaps the 1988 Madeira Conference’s greatest legacy lies in its ability to forge enduring relationships among the participating regional governments, forming a transnational network. This network ultimately influenced the European institutions’ shift from nationally-framed approaches to a more Community-based perspective towards the European integrated overseas thanks to a bottom-up initiative from these regions themselves within the CPMR. It recalls what Daniel and Jos already assessed in the aftermath of the Maastricht Treaty, that the creation of the “outermost regions” status ‘communitarized’ the issue of the European overseas.⁸⁴

Conclusion

While the 1988 Madeira Conference was indeed a turning point in the advocacy of a specific European overseas status through a process of uploading Europeanization—the process of transferring specific policy preferences to the European level⁸⁵—its role should not be overstated. Pre-existing entanglements between these regions, internal oppositions within them to European integration, and the fact that European institutions had already addressed these issues through nationally based frameworks and solutions must also be considered. Nonetheless, the network constituted during that meeting in Funchal was successful in implementing, for the Maastricht Treaty, a specific European status acknowledging those specific region’s need for derogations.

82 Official Journal of the European Communities, *The Treaty on European Union*, February 7, 1992, Maastricht, 154. Available at https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2002/4/9/2c2f2b85-14bb-4488-9ded-13f3cd04de05/publishable_en.pdf.

83 Bruce Millan, then Commissioner to the Regional Policy, used the term “ultraperipheral regions” in an English-language speech around 1990, hence why this word was preferred in this article. This shift in the terminology used warrants further investigation. See “Speech by Bruce Millan,” circa 1990, PT-ARM-DRAECE/DRACE/A/2/6, Arquivo e Biblioteca da Madeira, Funchal.

84 Daniel and Jos, “Les régions ultrapériméthiques face à l’union européenne: les difficultés de l’harmonisation dans la différence,” 30. In French, they use the verb “communautariser” between quotation marks.

85 John Connolly, “Europeanization, Uploading and Downloading: The Case of Defra and Avian Influenza.” *Public Policy and Administration* 23, no. 1 (2008), 7-25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0952076707083283>.

In the broader scholarly debate, I argue that to fully grasp the ongoing interrelations between colonialism and European integration, we must look beyond an excessive focus on Eurafrica. Whereas the work of Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson has compellingly challenged the overly simplistic narrative that views European integration as a direct outcome of decolonization, incorporating the outermost regions into the analysis offers a more comprehensive perspective. This approach not only expands the spatial scope but extends as well the temporal scope to the present day. In doing so, it reveals the enduring and multifaceted entanglements between European integration and (post) colonialism in regions home to approximately five million people. The Canary Islands alone surpass the population of several fully-fledged Member States, including Malta, Luxembourg, Cyprus, and Estonia. Furthermore, these territories remain among the EU's poorest, with Mayotte ranking as the poorest in 2022.⁸⁶ This broader perspective clarifies why the European Union continues to bear responsibility for geographically distant regions, as seen in the introduction.

86 “Regional gross domestic product by NUTS 2 region,” *Eurostat*, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.2908/TGS00003>